

THE
INVESTIGATORS
in

**THE MYSTERY OF THE
GANGLAND ASSIGNMENT**



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The Three Investigators receive a letter from someone who uses the pseudonym 'Moriarty' and refers to Jupiter as 'Sherlock Holmes'. Moriarty imposes on them an assignment to decode a mysterious message for him, and announces dire consequences for every day that passes until they succeed. This is no joke when Moriarty has Uncle Titus arrested for a dubious reason. Things get worst for Jupiter, Pete and Bob when they realize that they have to work against their principles, because Moriarty is not just an ordinary person, but the head of a gangland syndicate.

The Three Investigators
in
The Mystery of the Gangland Assignment

*Original German text by
Kari Erlhoff*

*Based on characters created by
Robert Arthur*

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Die drei ???: Botschaft aus der Unterwelt

(The Three ???: Message from the Underworld)

*by
Kari Erlhoff
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*Cover art by
Silvia Christoph*

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1. The Second Stain

“The case is solved!” Jupiter Jones smiled with satisfaction.

“What kind of case?” Mr Monroe, a young businessman with black hair, looked sceptically at Jupiter. He sat opposite Jupiter and Bob Andrews in an elegantly furnished meeting room at the office of Weston & Weston Architects in Rocky Beach.

“Before I begin,” Jupiter said, “I would like to introduce Inspector Cotta of the Rocky Beach Police Department...” The inspector who was seated next to Bob, nodded.

There were five other people there—the co-owners of the company, the elderly James Weston and his son, Joshua Weston; the secretary, Deborah Cassidy; the accountant Jane Trimble; and the caretaker, Ronald Burke.

“Well,” Jupiter pulled a case from his trouser pocket, “perhaps I should now introduce myself and my colleague Bob to the meeting.” He handed a business card to the woman on his left, Miss Cassidy.

The blonde woman looked briefly at her two bosses. Joshua Weston nodded at her encouragingly. Then she read aloud:



“Investigators? Are you kidding me? I thought you are here with your friends on a vacation job!” Mr Monroe looked over at Jupiter in disbelief, then at the two Westons.

Joshua Weston was timid in his comments: “I hired the three boys because I was concerned that someone here would leak information to the competition.”

A murmur went through the group.

“—And I was right!” he continued. “Today between 12:45 and 1:45 pm, the plans for our big construction project in Los Angeles were stolen!”

The murmur became louder.

“—But you don’t suspect one of us, sir?” That came from Ronald Burke. Unlike the rest of the neatly dressed gentlemen, he was a little odd as he was in his gardening overalls.

“Indeed!” Jupiter rubbed his hands. “The thief of the plans is here in this room.”

“That’s a pretty outrageous claim!” Mr Monroe exclaimed.

“Please let me explain,” said Joshua Weston. “Jupiter Jones will tell you in a moment how he arrived at this conclusion.”

“I will do that,” said Jupiter, “but let me explain what happened from the start.”

“That is what I would ask for!” hissed Miss Trimble.

“Not another endless monologue, please!” Bob whispered to his friend.

Mr Monroe was now studying the business card. "Where is your Second Investigator?" He smiled dismissively. "Is he going through the bins looking for more clues?"

"He will be with us in good time!" Jupiter did not let himself be put off. "Now, if I may begin the reconstruction of the crime."

He paused for a moment and then said: "Around 12:45 pm, Mr James Weston, Mr Joshua Weston, Bob and I came into this meeting room to discuss the status of our investigation. At that time, the plans were still in the top drawer of Mr Joshua Weston's desk."

"Correct, because I had put them in there just before the meeting," said Joshua Weston.

"So we know where the plans were at 12:45," Jupiter continued. "However, when we finished the meeting an hour later at 1:45 pm, we discovered that the plans had been stolen."

"Then someone got into the office within that hour and stole the plans!" Miss Trimble exclaimed. "You don't think one of us took them?"

"The windows of the office were closed and there was no evidence of forced entry," Jupiter continued. "Furthermore, the caretaker, Mr Burke, was in the garden all the time, trimming the bushes. He should have noticed someone breaking in."

"—Unless he is the thief himself," added Mr Monroe.

Jupiter went on talking as if the businessman had said nothing. "As I was expecting a theft or attempted copying of the plans today, my investigator colleague Pete and I thoroughly examined the carpet of Mr Weston's office beforehand. As some of you know, it is a rather delicate carpet on which traces can be clearly seen. When we returned from the meeting, the carpet was dirty. There were considerable specks of earth and several small red spots near the desk."

He took a transparent plastic bag out of his pocket and held it up. Everyone could see the specks of earth that the First Investigator had picked up. "The trail of earth stains leads from the front door, across the anteroom, into Mr Weston's office, and ends at his desk."

"It's quite clear that there can only be one suspect," Mr Monroe said.

"So it has to be the caretaker," Miss Trimble affirmed. "Look at his shoes! With that tread, he's carrying half a bed!"

"But I was outside all the time!" Mr Burke got nervous. "I... I didn't steal anything."

"It's obvious it was you, Burke!" Mr Monroe smiled confidently. "So just admit it... then we can all go home."

Jupiter placed the plastic bag in front of him on the table. "There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact, Mr Monroe!" He smiled at the businessman. "When I look at the course of events, I wonder, for example, why Mr Weston's secretary Miss Cassidy, who was sitting in the anteroom, did not see Mr Burke entering, if it was indeed him."

"That is true," confirmed the elderly Mr Weston, "unless she was not at her desk."

"Yes," Jupiter agreed. "I asked Miss Cassidy earlier. She said that she had left the anteroom twice in the hour in question. She was in the kitchenette for her lunch break from 12:45 pm to around 1 pm and later she went to the washroom around 1:20 pm."

"That's how it was," confirmed Miss Cassidy, with a slight blush on her cheeks.

"—And in that time, the plans were stolen!" cried Mr Monroe. "The stains speak for themselves."

"In a way, yes," Jupiter said calmly, "but not the way you think. The specks of earth are damp and show traces of fertilizer pellets. Mr Burke, however, worked in the garden between the bushes. The soil there is dry and rather sandy. Consequently, the earth on the carpet does not come from the sole of a shoe, but was taken out of the plant pots just outside the building."

"So what does that tell you?" asked Miss Trimble in surprise.

"We can assume that the thief laid a false trail," Jupiter explained. "He got some earth from the plant pots and scattered a trail of it from the door to Mr Weston's desk—to make it look as if someone wearing work shoes had walked in. The thief wanted the suspicion to fall on the caretaker. In fact, I suspect that the thief walked through the room without shoes. There is another indication for this—as there is a second stain."

"What?" Miss Trimble exclaimed.

"The second stain is a blood stain," Jupiter clarified. "Several red dots are seen right in front of Mr Weston's desk. I examined the surroundings and found a drawing pin that must have fallen off the desk. The thief stepped on it and unknowingly left the blood stain."

"So the thief walked in barefooted..." Mr Monroe stated.

"If we assume that Mr Burke would not incriminate himself," Jupe continued, "we can remove him from the suspect list."

The caretaker breathed a sigh of relief.

"That leaves only three suspects," said Bob, "Miss Trimble, Miss Cassidy and Mr Monroe."

"Exactly!" Jupe agreed. "So let's take a look at the chronological sequence of events. At about 1 pm, Miss Trimble arrived, didn't she?"

The accountant nodded. "When I came in, I saw Deborah coming out from the kitchenette. She said she had taken a short lunch break and offered me coffee."

"So Miss Trimble arrived at 1 pm, and Mr Monroe later at 1:25 pm. None of them could have taken advantage of Miss Cassidy's lunch break to enter the office unnoticed."

"Then the thief just struck at 1:20 pm when I was... well, in... the washroom," Miss Cassidy said.

"I'm not that far yet, Miss Cassidy," Jupiter said. "At about 1:10 pm you suggested to Miss Trimble to wait in the lounge and you accompanied her there." He turned to the younger Weston. "Could you please tell us all what's with the door to the lounge?"

"Yes." Joshua Weston nodded. "It's an old-fashioned sliding door that needs urgent refit. It's so warped it makes a loud squeak when you open it."

"We also heard this loud squeak here in the meeting room," confirmed Jupiter. "The door was opened and then closed again almost immediately after."

"That's right," confirmed the older Weston.

"So the door was closed at about 1:10 pm, and no further squeaks were heard. That meant that Miss Trimble did not leave the lounge until after 1:45 pm when Mr Weston met her after our meeting."

"Right! I was reading a magazine and waited," said Miss Trimble. "Does that give me an alibi?"

"Yes... That leaves only the secretary, Miss Cassidy, and Mr Monroe," Bob concluded, to cut Jupiter's rant short.

"That's right," said the First Investigator. "Miss Cassidy said she went to the washroom at 1:20 pm. Five minutes later, Mr Monroe came and took a seat in the anteroom. Looking at this fact, from about 1:25 pm onwards, Miss Cassidy and Mr Monroe both were in the anteroom."

"But then..." Miss Trimble took a look at the secretary. "Well, then it must have been Deborah!"

"No! This must be a misunderstanding!" Miss Cassidy slapped a hand over her mouth.

"You can save the theatre, Miss Cassidy," Jupiter said. "Mr Joshua Weston left his office to come here for the meeting at 12:45 pm. Just before 1 pm, you went into Mr Weston's office without your high-heeled shoes—which would have left marks on the carpet. Then you

took the building plans out of the drawer, and sprinkled earth from the flower pots on the carpet. After that, you hurried to the kitchenette to hide the documents. However, Miss Trimble came at 1 pm, so you quickly came back out to the anteroom.”

“That’s a lie!” Miss Cassidy didn’t look scared now, but very angry.

“I haven’t finished yet... There was something more you needed to do, so you suggested that Miss Trimble wait in the lounge. Then you went to the washroom, and after you came back, a while later, Mr Monroe arrived.”

“That’s ridiculous!” Miss Cassidy exclaimed. “You can’t prove any of that!”

“I can,” Jupiter said, but was interrupted, because the door to the meeting room opened.

Pete Crenshaw, the Second Investigator, entered the room together with a police officer. In Pete’s hands were several sheets of paper.

“I found the plans!” Pete beamed. “They were under a large tray in the storeroom at the back of the kitchenette.”

“—Where Miss Cassidy frantically hid them just before Miss Trimble arrived,” added Jupiter.

“I’ve had enough of this,” the secretary exclaimed and stood up. “I have not even entered Mr Weston’s office in his absence, let alone touched his desk!”

“Oh, yeah? Well, you can easily allay my suspicions, Miss Cassidy.” Jupiter stood up.

“—If I could ask you to remove your shoes.”

“Excuse me?” The woman looked at the First Investigator in horror.

“If you have done nothing wrong, you shouldn’t worry, right?” Joshua Weston said.
“Please take off your shoes.”

Reluctantly, the woman took her high-heeled shoes off her feet. “Now what?”

“I would like to see the soles of your feet.” Jupiter bent down. Everyone stared at the secretary’s delicate feet.

“Aha!” said Jupiter with satisfaction. He pointed to a plaster through which a dark red blood stain shimmered. “You stepped on the drawing pin in Mr Weston’s office, and left that blood stain on the carpet. Then you went into the washroom to clean and bandaged the wound. I found paper towels with traces of blood in the washroom bin.”

“So you did go into the office, Miss Cassidy,” said the inspector.

“In fact, Inspector Cotta had taken a sample of the blood stain as evidence and for forensics investigation,” the First Investigator dryly remarked. “Next time when you steal valuable documents, you should be more careful and watch your feet.”

“You’ll regret this!” The secretary stared angrily at Jupiter. “You have no idea what you just did!”

“I have very good ideas for exposing criminals,” Jupiter said, unimpressed.

“You’ll see...” Miss Cassidy threatened.

“I must ask you to come with me for questioning,” Cotta cut her off and signalled to his police officer.

After Miss Cassidy was taken outside, Mr Monroe asked Mr Weston: “If the plans are so valuable, why didn’t you keep them secured under lock and key?”

“I did,” Mr Weston replied. “They are still under lock and key. Perhaps Jupiter can explain this.”

“Yes,” the First Investigator beamed. “I had advised Mr Weston to put fake documents in his unlocked drawer to lure the thief out!”

The inspector turned to The Three Investigators. “Congratulations! You have successfully solved another case in no time!”

2. The Illustrious Client

Four days later, The Three Investigators met at The Jones Salvage Yard. Aunt Mathilda had made them sandwiches and the boys allowed themselves a short break in the warm midday sun.

While Pete and Bob were sitting on a pile of construction timber, gobbling up one sandwich after another, Jupiter held back from eating.

“You’re really not hungry?” Pete asked incredulously between two bites.

“In fact, I am.” Jupe stroked his stomach. “—But I’m on a pumpkin diet.”

“You have been talking about that for days!” Bob said in horror.

“I’ve never been on a pumpkin diet before!” the First Investigator defended himself.

“But at least a hundred other diets!” Pete rolled his eyes. “That can’t be healthy! You should—” He paused in mid-sentence as Inspector Cotta’s car drove into the yard.

“What is Cotta doing here? Does he have news about our case?” wondered Bob.

“No way!” Pete put his sandwich back on the sandwich paper. “We’ve solved the case of the building plans and put it on file.”

They watched Cotta get out. Unlike usual, he was wearing a short-sleeved T-shirt and canvas trousers today.

“Well, are you having a little lunch break?” asked the inspector after greeting The Three Investigators.

“More or less,” Jupiter mumbled. “You can have my sandwich.”

“No thanks, I have already eaten,” replied Inspector Cotta. “I am only here for a moment because I wanted to tell you that the secretary, Miss Cassidy, has finally admitted to having stolen the building plans.”

“There you go,” Pete said happily. “I told you—the case is closed.”

“It is for you,” said the inspector. “Unfortunately, Miss Cassidy does not want to betray the person who engaged her to steal the plans. In addition, we had to hand over the case yesterday. The FBI now deals with the secretary.”

“But it was only a theft!” Bob said in surprise.

“The FBI is not interested in the building plans, but in who Miss Cassidy works for,” Cotta explained. “It seems that there are links to a gangland syndicate in Los Angeles. If she were to testify, the police might be able to get to the people behind the crime, maybe even to the man at the top. It would then no longer be a matter of a few building plans, but of numerous crimes.”

“Worse than theft?” asked Pete curiously.

“Of course! There are crimes such as money laundering, extortion and fraud, not to mention industrial espionage and other illegal businesses.”

“What other illegal businesses?” Bob looked it up.

“Gambling and other things that are not your concern.” Inspector Cotta looked at the boys seriously. “We do not know who is behind these crimes, but we can be sure that this person is influential. Miss Cassidy refused to testify for good reason.”

“Because the mysterious gangland boss might take revenge on her?” Bob asked.

"It seems so," Cotta said. "Many witnesses do not testify for fear. Others demand to be placed in a witness protection programme in return for their testimony."

"Sounds like it's better not to mess with these criminals," said Pete.

"Right. Therefore I ask you not to investigate further in this case. It is a bit too big for you," warned Inspector Cotta.

Jupiter leaned back and sighed. "For us, the case is closed with the arrest of Miss Cassidy. The plans have been secured and the construction project can continue. We have therefore completed our client's assignment to his satisfaction."

"Very nice!" Inspector Cotta looked relieved. "Then I can start my holiday with a good feeling!"

"Will you be around in Rocky Beach?" Bob asked.

"No, I'm going fishing with my brother for a fortnight. He has booked a secluded cabin on a lake. That place has no electricity and running water, let alone mobile reception so my colleagues can't call me when they are overwhelmed with a case."

"Then we wish you a safe journey and a successful catch," said Bob.

"Thank you, and you should take a break from investigation for a while. Have a nice holiday!" The inspector said goodbye and went back to his car.

"He's right," said Pete as Cotta drove away. "We should really take a holiday. Kelly keeps asking when I'm going to take her to the movies or the beach again."

"And I—" Bob was just about to tell them about his holiday plans when Aunt Mathilda marched towards the three of them.

"You have mail!" She had a stack of letters in her hand. "There are several letters for you, Jupe." She handed him the stack. Then she looked at her nephew with concern. "You are so pale! Haven't you eaten enough?"

"Yes, plenty of pumpkins, Aunt Mathilda." He took the mail. "I'm fine!"

"Well, if you're all healthy and fit, then you can help Titus clear the truck. He's just came back from Santa Clarita with a load of furniture."

"Okay, Aunt Mathilda. We'll help in a minute." The First Investigator moaned. "I'm just going to look through the letters."

"Fine, I'll take your word for it!" said Aunt Mathilda as she walked away, "and don't dawdle."

Jupiter opened the first envelope. Inside was a card from Mr Weston. He thanked The Three Investigators for their efforts and had enclosed a cheque.

"We told him that we don't take fees," Jupiter said.

"It's a nice donation into our coffers," Pete said, "and with it, we can pay our phone bills."

"Well, all right..." Jupiter was already on the second envelope. It came from a club that did charity work in Rocky Beach. The First Investigator skimmed the lines, then he gasped for breath.

"What's wrong?" Bob asked when he saw Jupiter's horrified face.

"Somebody signed me up for this year's Rocky Beach Quarter Marathon!"

"What?" cried Bob and Pete simultaneously.

"Yes! It says here that the club thanks me for my registration. My entry fee will be donated to a local children's aid organization."

"You're supposed to be on that marathon? It's over ten kilometres!" Pete looked at his friend in disbelief. "You've never jogged that far before!"

"This must be a prank," Bob surmised, "might be by someone at school."

"That's what I thought at first," replied Jupiter in dismay, "but then I read that the money for the registration had already been paid."

"The pranksters have just pooled their chump change," said Pete.

"Chump change?" Jupiter held the letter out to Pete. "We're talking about a hundred dollars!"

The Second Investigator stared at the letter. "Indeed! A whole hundred dollars. Whoever it is, he's very interested in seeing you run."

"Physical activity is not exactly my speciality," Jupiter said dryly.

"Oh, you still have a few weeks before the marathon," Pete said. "If we start training today, you might even make it to the finish line... before nightfall."

"Ha! Ha! Very funny," Jupe responded.

"Besides, this is certainly more effective than your pumpkin nonsense!" Pete added. "We could start right away. Cotta also said that we should take a break."

"No! I'm going to call them now and cancel this," Jupiter said decisively.

"That would be a pity," Bob remarked. "Just think of the children who would benefit from the money. It's for a good cause."

"Right. You have a social responsibility now!"

"Arrgh! Never mind. I have to think about it," Jupiter said, grumbling. "Wild horses can't drag me to go jogging, let alone a quarter marathon!"

Pete happened to see the last letter in Jupe's hand. "What's with that bright red envelope?"

"Scarlet," Jupe corrected him.

"Scarlet, red, what difference does it make?" Pete argued.

"The colour of the envelope is strong to vivid red or reddish orange," Jupe explained, "so it's scarlet."

"Sheesh! Scarlet, red, purple, or green, why don't you just open the letter and see what it is?" Pete burst out.

On the front of the envelope was Jupiter's address written in old-fashioned cursive writing. "Jupiter Jones, alias Sherlock Holmes," read the First Investigator in surprise. On the back, where the sender's address was usually written, there was only one word: 'Moriarty'.

"Who is it from?" Pete asked. He bent over to see the letter better. "Another strenuous activity for you?"

"I would say that it comes from the 'Napoleon of crime'!" said Jupiter.

Pete made a bewildered face. "The Napoleon of what?"

"The 'Napoleon of crime'," Jupiter repeated. "That is the nickname Sherlock Holmes gave his illustrious adversary, Professor Moriarty, in the famous tales of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle."

"If he is a criminal, how do you consider him illustrious?" Pete wondered.

"Well, according to his creator, Moriarty has had an illustrious past prior to indulging in crime," Jupe explained, "for instance, he had held a university teaching post and had written a number of significant academic papers."

"What we have is an illustrious criminal!" Bob added.

"So Sherlock Jones, why not open the letter and see what it says," Pete said.

Jupiter tore open the envelope. He took out a sheet of paper that was written on with equally bright red ink—scarlet again as Jupiter would call it. At the same time, something else fluttered to the ground. It was a hectically scribbled note, which had been torn from a ring binder. Bob picked it up and handed it to the First Investigator. "This was enclosed with the letter."

“We’ll get to that in a minute.” Jupiter stared at the scarlet characters. “I’m afraid we have a new client!” he said after reading the letter.

“Super! What is it about?” Bob asked with interest.

Jupiter fell silent as he continued to stare at the piece of paper.

“Shall I read it?” Bob offered.

“No need, I’ll do it.” Pete grabbed the paper from Jupe and read out:

Dear Holmes,

Congratulations on your latest masterpiece of deduction!

It is remarkable that despite your youthfulness, you have such a sharp mind. However, I very much regret that this very mind got in my way. To be more precise, your work has had a negative impact on my business. I usually make short work of my opponents, but in this case, I see the possibility of cooperation. To make a long story short, I would like to use your services as a private investigator.

I have just received a coded message that I would like decoded for the benefit of a friend. It is enclosed with this letter. I know this much—my friend’s people found the message in a university. Just think of it as a little puzzle from one student to another—a little joke, so to speak. However, to you and your two Watsons, please solve it immediately!

To encourage you to work enthusiastically on it, I have taken the liberty of causing you some inconvenience. For the time being, it is only a friendly challenge. However, with each day that passes without results, I will increasingly take action. You might not know my methods yet, but I can assure you that you do not want me as an enemy.

Since you are a modern-day Sherlock Holmes, this puzzle is so clearly for your attention... and you will certainly not want to fail.

I’m keeping my eye on you. If you succeed, I will know.

*Yours respectfully,
Professor James Moriarty*

PS: I wish you a pleasant run!

“Well, it seems to me that this illustrious criminal has imposed on us to take him as an illustrious client!” Bob remarked.

3. A Study in Scarlet

"I only understood half of it," Pete said discontentedly as they sat in their headquarters a few minutes later.

Headquarters was an old mobile home trailer that served as an office for The Three Investigators. The trailer was located in the salvage yard but was hidden under a mountain of scrap metal. It could only be entered through secret passages. Seemingly randomly placed amongst the scrap mountain was an old refrigerator known as the Cold Gate. Inside the fridge was a hidden mechanism that allowed the back wall to be pushed aside. This was to reveal a short dark tunnel of corrugated sheet metal that led to the main entrance of the trailer.

Jupiter had decided that it was better to discuss everything else at Headquarters so that they were kept safe from the eyes of Aunt Mathilda. After all, there was a lot of work waiting for the boys in the salvage yard.

"This Moriarty wants me to solve a puzzle for him," Jupiter explained tonelessly. He let himself fall into the leather chair. "I fear he wants to test me and see how dangerous I am to him."

"But why?" Pete asked.

"Because we supposedly got in his way in our last case," Bob explained.

"Our mysterious letter writer compares me to Sherlock Holmes..." Jupiter looked at the letter with the scarlet writing again. "—And he doesn't sign his real name, but calls himself after Sherlock Holmes's most famous adversary—Professor James Moriarty."

"The comparison with Sherlock Holmes is obvious, Jupe," Pete commented. "The way you solve cases, you remind me of the great master detective."

Jupiter looked at his friend thoughtfully. "Well, I share his gift of logical deduction and I admit that I am a successful private investigator. So much for the similarities, otherwise I see few parallels. For example, Holmes took drugs like cocaine and he was a heavy smoker. Both are out of the question for me. Also, I'm not English, not tall and thin, like Holmes; I don't play the violin—or any other instrument; and finally, Sherlock Holmes, unlike me, is a fictional person. That means—"

"Yeah, yeah, I know he is only a character in a book," Pete completed the sentence.
"That much is clear to me too."

"Let's just get to the message we're supposed to decode," Bob interfered before the conversation got out of hand.

"Before moving on to the message, we should check what this letter and envelope tell us." Jupiter gave both to Bob. "What do you conclude from the documents at hand?"

Bob thoroughly inspected the front and back of the envelope. "Expensive paper, probably handmade," he noted. "It somehow indicates that this Moriarty is rich."

"He did spend a hundred dollars to enter me in a charity marathon," Jupiter said. "I can safely assume that Moriarty is behind the marathon thing because in his letter, he wishes me a pleasant run."

"But why does Moriarty want you to run? What's in it for him?"

"He wants to put me under pressure," said the First Investigator. "Yes, I think that in this way he wants to show me that he has the power and the money to intervene in my life. It's a

foretaste, so to speak, of what I could be in for if I refuse the case or cannot solve it.”

“He seems to know you well! Such a race is an absolute horror for you! But others, like Pete, would have been happy to participate,” Bob thought.

“This Moriarty has apparently been keeping an eye on us for a few days now,” Jupiter said grimly, “maybe even longer. It’s not particularly difficult to find out something about us. There are enough newspaper articles about our achievements.”

“So he figured out how to make your life miserable,” Bob added.

“In any case, he may call himself ‘Moriarty’, but in the end we’ll find out who he really is,” Jupiter said belligerently.

“We just don’t have the clues.” Pete pointed to the envelope. “The fact that he’s rich doesn’t really help us yet.”

“We are investigators. It’s our job to find clues.” Jupiter examined the scarlet envelope. “Firstly, we have the postmark. The letter was posted yesterday in Los Angeles.”

“Then all we have to do is to check the few million people who live in this city and all the millions in Greater LA. It will be a small thing!” Pete laughed.

His friends, however, were not in the mood for joking. Unperturbed, Jupiter continued: “Secondly, this Moriarty is wealthy.”

“We’ve already been through this,” said the Second Investigator impatiently. Bob gave him a light nudge. Once Jupiter was on the trail of clues, he was not to be disturbed.

“Thirdly, it is clear that this is connected with our immediate past case at Weston & Weston,” Jupiter thought aloud. “Before that, we were looking for a runaway cat. Moriarty could not have meant that case.”

“But before the cat, there was a whole series of cases where we annoyed some criminals,” Pete said.

“That’s right... but then this Moriarty would have contacted us sooner. After all, he did mention my ‘latest masterpiece of deduction’... Besides, the context fits.”

“In what way?” Bob asked.

“Do you remember what Cotta said? The attempt to steal the building plans was for a gangland syndicate in Los Angeles.”

“And this Moriarty is with the syndicate?” Bob wondered.

“Well, a few days after we foiled the theft of the building plans, we received a letter from a person calling himself ‘Moriarty’ of all people.”

“—After the opponent of Sherlock Holmes,” Bob added.

“With this he gives us a hint about himself!” Jupe continued. “Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Moriarty is none other than a criminal mastermind, and even a consultant for various London gangs and criminals. When many of his plans are hampered or undone by Holmes, he goes after the detective.”

“So there’s a similarity here,” Bob added. “You hampered our Moriarty’s plans and now he comes after you.”

“That doesn’t sound good,” Pete admitted. “If this Moriarty is half as powerful as his namesake, he is not to be trifled with.”

“Too bad Inspector Cotta is on holiday.” Bob sighed. “For once we really need his help!”

“So we have no choice but to agree to Moriarty’s conditions for the time being and decode the message,” Jupiter said contritely. “Along the way, we have to look into how we can put a stop to him.”

“Then I suggest we do this decoding quickly.” Pete stood up and stretched. “Now would be the best time.”

“I don’t mind.” Jupiter placed the coded message on his desk in front of him. Pete and Bob looked over the First Investigator’s shoulder.

At first glance, it was obvious that the message came from someone other than Moriarty. The text seemed to be written down in great haste:

My good Holmes,

*As night descends upon me;
I fear the shadows it brings.
Danger lurking everywhere;
Among many other things.*

*I leave the apple with regrets;
And the queen now takes care of me.
But there is nothing to worry;
With the angels, I will be free.*

*You need to go on a long road;
To meet the woman you respect.
In our language, you greet her;
Only then you’ll get this correct.*

*It’s our crazy beginning;
But not the month, and not the day.
Ignore, when infinity stands;
Three remains to show you the way.*

*Now look between card and copp;
To get to the final clue.
The last is all that matters;
But choose the one that is true.*

*Sincerely yours,
W.*

“Another letter to Sherlock Holmes!” Pete said in surprise. “This time it a poem from a ‘W’.”

“Yes, but this one is not meant for me.” Jupiter stroked his chin. “—And certainly not a letter to the Sherlock Holmes from the books of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. There must be a real person behind this—someone who could decode the message.”

“A letter from a ‘W’ to Holmes,” Bob said. “I presume that ‘W’ stands for ‘Watson’—Holmes’s associate in the books.”

“I would think so as well,” Jupe agreed. “These two people are concealing their identities with nicknames.”

“I understand from the first verse that this ‘W’ is in danger and has to flee,” Bob said, “and in the rest of the poem, he gives this Holmes the clues—perhaps for the hiding place of a treasure, a code word, or a place.”

“In the second verse, there is mention of ‘apple’, ‘queen’, and ‘angels’,” Pete said triumphantly. “I can already see two cities being implied here. ‘Apple’ could very well mean the ‘Big Apple’ which is New York, and ‘queen’ and ‘angels’ clearly refers to—”

“—*El Pueblo de la Reyna de los Angeles!*” Jupe interrupted him. “There are many versions of the Spanish name but basically the translation is: ‘The Town of the Queen of the Angels’.”

“So we are certain that ‘W’ is trying to say that he has left New York for Los Angeles—right here, close to us!” Bob remarked.

“That’s the easy part to decode...” Pete looked at the piece of paper again. “—But the rest of the poem is unfortunately quite confusing.”

“Let us assume that Moriarty was able to decode this part of the message—as we have just done,” Jupiter said, lost in thought. “—Then he knows that the trail leads to LA, but the rest of the text remains a mystery to him. That is why he engages us to handle it.”

“All of this for a friend in New York?” Pete asked doubtfully. “Besides, it’s supposed to be a joke among students.”

“Perhaps Moriarty is not telling us everything about this,” Jupe surmised. “More needs to be found out.”

“So how do we proceed?” Bob asked.

“First I want you to talk to your father,” replied Jupiter. Bob’s father worked as a journalist and editor for the *Los Angeles Times*. “Maybe he can give us information on major criminal organizations in the area.”

“That won’t help us!” Pete raised an eyebrow in doubt. “There are hundreds of criminals in Los Angeles. In addition, Inspector Cotta said that we must not deal with them because it is too dangerous. Have you already forgotten that?”

“We have solved more dangerous cases,” replied Jupe. “Moreover, we did not actively seek for this new case, but rather slipped into it passively, so to speak. Whether we like it or not, we now have to investigate. To get a better idea of what this is all about, we must look into the true identity of Moriarty.”

“That could be quite dangerous,” Pete said, after briefly thinking about it.

“We have to accept that. Even if we seem to take over the case, we should find out who is behind it,” Bob said.

“Well, you seem confident about this.” Pete crossed his arms. “We haven’t even decoded the message and you are already planning to expose Moriarty. If he finds out that we are not following his instructions, we will face the consequences. These gangland bosses are big on revenge. You’ll see when Moriarty sends you a package with my ears or a finger! Then it will be too late for regrets.”

“Being pessimistic won’t help us.” Jupiter leaned back.

“I am not pessimistic,” Pete said. “I would just like to keep all my body parts—in the right place!”

“We will investigate with appropriate caution,” Jupiter reassured the Second Investigator. He then he opened a drawer, took out a magnifying glass, and used it to take a closer look at the two documents.

“What are you looking for?” Pete asked.

“I just want to see if there are any tell-tale signs in both the letter and the message,” Jupe replied.

“Perhaps if you also stick a pipe in your mouth now, you’ll really look like Holmes,” Pete suggested.

“—Along with a deerstalker hat and a cape, it’ll be perfect!” Bob added with a laugh.

“Enough with that!” Jupe brushed the jokes aside. “Let’s go on... What do you conclude from the words of our letter writer ‘W’?”

"Since the letter is addressed to a certain Sherlock Holmes..." Bob said, "I presume the clues are based on the stories of Sherlock Holmes."

"That's right, Bob. In any case, 'Sherlock Holmes' is our starting point. It can be assumed that his cases play a significant role in the solution. It is therefore imperative that we learn more about the master detective."

"Shall I go straight to the library?" Bob wondered. "I know there are some Holmes stories in the collection."

"Not necessary," replied Jupiter. "There is no time to go through each and every one of the stories."

"Then what do you suggest?" Bob asked.

"I was going to go to Ruxton University this week anyway to pick up the summer programme for students. I'm sure there will be someone in the university who could give us more in-depth information on this matter."

"Good idea, Jupe!" Bob was thrilled. "If we call Dr Barrister, I'm sure he'll direct us to one of his colleagues who can help us!"

Dr Henry W. Barrister was an anthropology specialist at Ruxton University and had helped The Three Investigators with previous cases.

"When do you want to start?" Pete asked.

"First thing in the morning." Jupiter made an unhappy face. "Unfortunately, it's already too late now." He grabbed the phone. "—But I'll try to contact Dr Barrister to sound him out. Cross your fingers that I can get him!"

4. The Three Students

The next morning, The Three Investigators went in Bob's Beetle to nearby Ruxton University.

Dr Barrister had been able to put them in touch with someone who could help them. A short while later, Jupiter, Pete and Bob knocked on the door of Professor Jane Heathcliff's room in the Department of English Literature.

A slender woman with greying hair opened the door. "Are you the boys that Henry told me about?" she asked in a good mood.

Jupiter nodded and extended his hand to Professor Heathcliff. He introduced himself and his friends.

As they sat down in the bright office, the First Investigator came to the point. "As I am sure Dr Barrister has already told you, we are looking for information about the Sherlock Holmes stories of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle," he said. "I myself am of course aware that these are fictional investigation stories from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in recent years I have read a good deal of them."

Professor Heathcliff smiled. "Did you read the abbreviated versions of the books?"

"By no means! I have read the texts in the original, ma'am!" Jupiter exclaimed. "I have no problems with literature from the Victorian period. Although I am of course aware that the Holmes material was often published in abridged and simplified versions, and some movie adaptations and radio plays do not exactly follow the original closely."

The professor was visibly surprised. "You seem to know your way around better than I thought. The way you sound, you could easily take part in my seminar for first-year students. You must have a good English teacher at your high school."

"I read a lot," Jupiter boasted. "Nevertheless, I am afraid that my knowledge on this subject is not sufficient to solve the case we are currently dealing with."

"And what is this case about?" asked Professor Heathcliff curiously.

"I'm afraid there is not much we can tell as we ourselves are unsure."

"Okay, but Henry did warn me that you were on the trail of a great secret."

"It could be something like that," Bob said.

"Well, I can give you some reviews, commentaries, and analytical essays on Sherlock Holmes and his cases. In fact, I attempt to collect everything that is published about him. There is, for example, a very interesting essay that deals with the question of whether the breaks in the time structure of the stories are intentional or whether they are the author's mistakes. I also have a text that deals with the biography of Holmes."

"Sounds... uh... very interesting." Pete sighed at the multi-page texts that the professor was holding out to him.

"It is really very interesting! Especially since the author of this essay has mysteriously disappeared."

Now even the Second Investigator was listening. "Disappeared? How so?"

Professor Heathcliff shrugged. "Oh, I'm afraid I don't know much about the matter. A colleague in New York told me."

"New York?" Jupiter wondered.

“Yes, it was a student who wanted to write his doctoral thesis on Sherlock Holmes with my colleague... but then he disappeared without a trace.”

“Strange,” Bob thought.

“Well, it happens that students cannot stand the pressure to perform and at some point pack their bags. Perhaps it was so in this case as well.”

“We’ll definitely want to read the essay!” said Jupiter.

“Okay, I can make a copy of it for you...” she said, “but before that, do you want me to give you an overview of the cases of Sherlock Holmes?”

“Yes! Of course,” Bob said. “That’ll be great.”

“In total, as you might already know, there are four novels and fifty-six short stories written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. It’s easy to lose track, especially as some stories have also appeared under different names and have up to four different titles in translations.” She held up a list. “Fortunately, we researchers have a system of abbreviations. Practical, huh?”

Bob nodded. “Yes, very convenient.”

Professor Heathcliff really got going. “Then I have an essay on the friendship between Holmes and Watson, and a paper dealing with Professor Moriarty.”

“We are definitely interested to know more about Moriarty,” Bob said.

“James Moriarty is in a way the dark counterpart of Sherlock Holmes. However, he appears far less often than one might think,” explained Professor Heathcliff. “You will be amazed, but Moriarty only plays a direct role in two stories, otherwise, he is only mentioned.” She pointed to an illustration showing a gaunt man with a sinister expression. “—And yet, in the short story *The Final Problem*, Moriarty fought with Sherlock Holmes and were both killed!”

“This is news to me!” said Pete with an ominous look at Jupiter.

“Holmes and Moriarty fought a duel at the Reichenbach Falls in Switzerland,” the First Investigator said. “They fell down the waterfall and both died.”

The professor added: “—At least, that was the intention of the author at the time the story was written.”

“What do you mean by that?” Pete asked.

“Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wanted to turn to other stories,” Professor Heathcliff explained. “Therefore he let his main character die. However, the readers didn’t like that. They wrote angry letters to Doyle telling him to bring back their favourite detective—which he did eventually.”

“How did he explain bringing back Holmes?” Pete asked.

“At some point, Doyle wrote stories about Holmes again and simply explained that he had survived the fight at the waterfall and that only Moriarty had died.”

“Then Sherlock Holmes was really lucky to have such nice readers,” cried Pete.

“That’s right.” Professor Heathcliff placed the sheets on the copier and pressed a few buttons. “Otherwise, there would be fewer stories of him and Dr Watson.”

Bob’s backpack had a stack of papers on Sherlock Holmes when The Three Investigators was walking across the campus back to the Beetle.

“I feel like a student!” moaned Pete. “I can literally feel the pressure to perform on my back.”

“Well, I could certainly imagine studying here,” said Bob. “Maybe I’ll apply to Ruxton after high school. I like this university.”

“A strange coincidence!” murmured Jupiter.

“What? That I might want to study here one day?” Bob asked, confused.

“No, I mean the fact that we have a letter in which a man named ‘W’ says that he must flee. We know that this letter was found in a university in New York, and now we learn that a man has disappeared in a university also in New York—someone who is working on exactly the same subject as our mysterious letter writer.”

“Namely, Sherlock Holmes,” Bob added.

“Right! That doesn’t sound like a coincidence to me anymore.” Jupiter looked determined. “I think we could be dealing with the missing literature student in this case. Wait!” Jupiter reached for Bob’s backpack.

“What are you gonna do?”

Jupiter did not answer. He opened the backpack and pulled out the copies.

“Jupe, would you mind telling us what you’re doing?” Pete asked in surprise.

“There he is!” Jupiter took one of the essays. “The student’s name is Lester Price. Sorry, no name with a ‘W’.”

“The ‘W’ from the letter will certainly refer to ‘Watson’,” Pete interjected. “We’ve already got that far.”

“This Lester Price could still be behind the mysterious message,” Bob said. “He had to leave New York in a hurry and left the message for another student to decode.”

“It is definitely appropriate to find out more about Lester Price, but that will have to wait until we get back to Headquarters. I don’t want to call from a mobile phone to New York—it will be expensive.” Jupiter entered the car park, and suddenly he stopped. “I almost forgot about the documents for the summer courses.” He moaned.

“How could you forget something?” Pete asked cautiously. “Are you not feeling well?”

“Everything is fine,” mumbled Jupiter. “I just need some pumpkins!”

The moment The Three Investigators stepped into Headquarters, they saw a flashing light on their answering machine. “We have messages,” Bob said.

Bob pressed the play button and his father’s voice sounded. “Hi, Bob. It’s regarding what you wanted to know about the Los Angeles gangland lately. Except for a few arrests and the closure of two nightclubs, I unfortunately have no information worth mentioning. I can’t give you any names either, because the police won’t give them out or because the names of the real masterminds are not known. These men operate in the dark. They are shadows that nobody can get hold of. Basically, the big crime syndicates are about drug trafficking and other crimes that young people are better off not dealing with. I would much prefer it if you were looking for a missing cat or a worthless necklace for a change. By the way, your mother wants you to mow the lawn tonight. It’s long overdue. She says the garden looks like a jungle.” It clicked.

Pete was about to comment when a second message was played. This time it was not Mr Andrews. The voice was distorted and sounded tinny: “Dear Sherlock Holmes... I see that even after twenty-four hours, you still haven’t found a solution. Very sad. I also have to say that you are not complying with my conditions. Your investigation should be concerned only with the coded message and not with my identity. I take it upon myself to react accordingly!”

The Three Investigators looked at each other in dismay.

“He can’t be signing you up for yet another marathon, Jupe!” Pete looked down at his fingers. “Oh my, Moriarty’s gonna get one of us!”

“He knows we want to investigate him,” Bob said thoughtfully. “That means—”

Jupiter immediately raised his hands to interrupt Bob. Then he put his index finger to his lips telling them to keep quiet.

“—That means that we have to strictly follow Moriarty’s instructions, otherwise we will have loads of problems,” Jupe said as he reached for a notepad and hastily wrote something down. Pete and Bob leaned over him. It said:

HQ is bugged!

Bob nodded. He had understood. Pete also remained silent. Jupe then wrote another message on the notepad:

Keep talking, otherwise M. will become suspicious!

“You’re right, Jupe,” Bob said. “What shall we do now?”

“We have to work on the coded message urgently,” Jupe said.

Then Pete said: “Should we now take a look at the essays from Professor Heathcliff. Perhaps we will find something in them that will help us.”

“I’ll go get them,” Bob said and was just about to get up to go take his backpack when the boys heard Aunt Mathilda’s voice through the open hatch in the roof of the trailer. She sounded more upset and shrill than usual.

Jupiter jumped up. “Something is wrong! Let’s go!” The First Investigator hurried anxiously to the exit.

5. The Blue Carbuncle

“You can’t do this!” Aunt Mathilda angrily told two policemen standing to the left and right of Uncle Titus.

One of them was Kenny Cinelly, a young officer with whom The Three Investigators did not get along very well. Cinelly was overzealous and quick to draw wrong conclusions. The boys had seen the other officer several times before, but did not know his name.

Jupiter could not believe his eyes when he saw Cinelly handcuffing Uncle Titus’s wrists. Uncle Titus did not resist. He just looked helplessly at his wife. His black moustache trembled.

“What’s wrong?” Jupiter joined the small group, closely followed by Pete and Bob.

“They want to arrest Titus!” cried Aunt Mathilda. Her chubby face had turned red.

Kenny Cinelly turned briskly to Titus Jones and said: “You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law...”

“This is absurd!” Aunt Mathilda bent over threateningly. She looked as if she was about to pull Cinelly’s ears out. “My husband has done nothing wrong.”

“Mr Jones hid stolen goods in the salvage yard!” said the other policeman. “Dealing in stolen goods is punishable by imprisonment.”

“My uncle buys up old items, junk and antiques from private sellers,” explained Jupiter. “He would never deliberately buy stolen goods. There is no doubt that everything is in order!”

“In this case, it is not a question of old items and junk,” Kenny Cinelly held a wooden box out to Jupiter. The First Investigator took a look inside. Displayed on a black velvet cushion was a huge blue gemstone.

Jupiter looked up in shock. “I can’t imagine that my uncle could have bought this.”

“Neither did I!” Uncle Titus defended himself. “I’ve never seen that box before.”

“This gemstone was stolen from a private collection in San Francisco half a year ago. It is a rare and valuable blue carbuncle,” the policeman explained.

“Listen here! I did not buy this thing, nor did I steal it,” Uncle Titus said, obviously nervous. “I told you that I have never even seen this box before!”

“Don’t even try to lie to us. We have received a definite tip-off that the thief of this carbuncle has just met you here and has offered you the gemstone. There are even photographs to prove it.”

“Photographs can be forged so easily nowadays,” replied Jupiter.

“That’s not all. This salvage yard is apparently known in thieving circles for accepting hot goods.”

“I can assure you that my uncle doesn’t do anything like that!” Jupiter was appalled. “Please call Inspector Cotta and he will confirm that—”

“Inspector Cotta is on holiday!” Cinelly interrupted the First Investigator. “—And I can handle the Rocky Beach thieves by myself.”

“Come on!” The second policeman led Uncle Titus to the patrol car.

“I won’t let you do this!” Aunt Mathilda stood in their way. When she wanted to, she could look very imposing.

Cinelly actually flinched for a moment, but then he came to his senses. "Surely you're not preventing an arrest, ma'am." The young policeman glared at her angrily. "If you interfere, you can join your husband in the car."

Aunt Mathilda stared at the policeman and gasped: "How dare you threaten me!"

Cinelly did not let Aunt Mathilda finish. "We have enough evidence to put your husband behind bars for years and close this junkyard. Then the illegal dealings will be over!" Obviously Cinelly liked the role of the tough lawman. "Now, if you'll excuse me. I have work to do." He then opened the driver's door of the police car and got in.

Uncle Titus gave his wife an unhappy look from the back seat of the patrol car. The next moment, Cinelly started the engine.

As the police car drove off the yard, Aunt Mathilda gave a gasp. Normally, she would have let out her anger with a huge rant, but the gasping was not followed by anything. She just stood there as if struck by lightning. The sight of her scared Jupiter immediately. He had never seen his aunt like that before.

"Aunt Mathilda?" Carefully, he touched her arm. She didn't react.

"Mrs Jones, shall we get you a glass of water?" Bob asked.

Pete pushed a garden chair towards her.

"No, I'm fine." Aunt Mathilda dropped on the chair.

Jupiter felt helpless—a feeling he hardly knew otherwise. "Wouldn't you like a glass of water after all?" he asked hesitantly.

Aunt Mathilda looked up at him. "I just don't believe this! How could this happen? Titus never accepted stolen goods! Never!" She raised her clenched fists. "This must be some kind of conspiracy! A sneaky conspiracy! Perhaps the competition!"

"We will find out, Aunt Mathilda," Jupiter promised. "What are we investigators for?"

However, the First Investigator knew that in this case, he did not need to carry out any investigations to figure out the background of the arrest. This was Moriarty's second strike, with a warning that he should only focus on the coded message. Jupiter knew that he could do nothing about this.

"I'm going to call our lawyer." Aunt Mathilda got up. She brought a wry smile to her face. "You'll see, Jupe, we'll have Titus back with us soon!"

"I hope so!" Jupiter tried to appear as confident as possible. "We'll find out what this carbuncle is all about."

After Aunt Mathilda disappeared into the yard office, Pete burst out: "Cinelly is the biggest idiot who has ever been allowed to wear a police uniform! He loves to exert his authority... but we won't give him that pleasure."

"Unfortunately, this time he's getting that chance when Cotta is not around," said Jupiter tiredly.

"To be honest, Cinelly doesn't worry me so much right now. He's just an instrument of Moriarty's," Bob said. "Whoever this Moriarty is, he must be quite influential. Not only did he plant stolen goods in the salvage yard, but he also got false witnesses and fabricated photos to support his claims. Unfortunately, the police believed this wholeheartedly."

"He's gonna get you, Jupe!" Pete looked at his friend with concern. "I mean, this thing with Uncle Titus getting arrested is on a whole different ball game compared to that stupid marathon."

The Second Investigator bit his lip. He had uttered the words before he had thought them over. Jupiter was tough, but Moriarty had just given him a really bad time. The First Investigator probably needed cheering up now. Pete was annoyed that he had shown so little tact, but how could he cheer Jupe up? Should he say that everything would be all right?

Before he could open his mouth, Jupiter had set himself in motion. With energetic steps, he headed for Headquarters. "Moriarty was clear in his warning," he said as he walked. "We shouldn't concern ourselves with him any further, but solve the puzzle."

"—And for this warning, he has squandered a precious gemstone!" Pete said stunned. "I suppose one of his men must have stolen it, and then planted it here."

"If he is really so rich and powerful, then the blue carbuncle will not have been a great loss to him... and if it was stolen property, he might have had a hard time getting rid of the stone at a conventional jeweller or auction house," Jupiter said, "but I don't want to deal with that now. We have more urgent things to do. The puzzle does not solve itself, and I don't want to wait for the next strike from Moriarty."

"Then let's not waste any time," said Bob.

"Wait!" Jupiter stopped just before opening the Cold Gate. "First we search Headquarters for bugs, then we take on the puzzle. Unfortunately, we can't call the university in New York while we're being bugged. I don't want Moriarty to know we're on that trail."

"I don't know. Shouldn't we rather—" Pete began.

"We have to pretend to deal with the puzzle right away," Jupiter interrupted him. "If there are eavesdroppers, they'll feel safe."

"So if we find a bug, do we destroy it?" whispered the Second Investigator.

"No," Jupe whispered back to Pete. "We place the bug in our lab. Now and then, we talk such that nobody suspects anything. If we destroy it, Moriarty will know we've got it figured out."

"If there really is a bug in Headquarters, how do you suppose that they managed to enter and installed them?" Bob asked.

"I don't suppose that they know about the secret entrances," Jupe surmised, "which means that the only other way they could have got in is through the roof hatch!"

"So we're going bug hunting!" Pete sighed. "Come on, the sooner we finish it, the sooner we can take care of this puzzle."

With that, Jupiter turned around entered the Cold Gate, followed by his friends.

6. The Five Orange Pips

"I think the puzzle refers to a Sherlock Holmes story," Bob said loud and clear as he peered under the desk.

The Three Investigators were back at their headquarters, looking for a hidden listening device. They wanted to talk to each other so that Moriarty would not suspect anything.

"A good approach, Bob!" Pete replied.

The Second Investigator thought feverishly about what else he could say. He had just seen a Sherlock Holmes movie on TV. Yes, he could refer to that. He stepped up to the bookshelf. "Maybe it's the story of that horrible dog!" He shone his flashlight behind the dusty back wall of a filing cabinet. "You know, the one about that dog of 'Basketville'."

"Baskervilles," Bob corrected him. "It's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*."

Anyway, Pete wasn't really listening because at that moment, he had reached out and fished a small object out from behind the cabinet. It was white and was about the size of an orange pip, only flatter. It was a bug!

Jupiter nodded at Pete and gave him a thumbs-up. Then he pointed silently at the laboratory. The Second Investigator brought the device into the next room and placed it in a cardboard box.

"Well, I don't see a direct connection between this Holmes case and the message. There is no mention of dogs anywhere!" Bob took a picture frame off the wall. He grinned. There was a bug here as well. Moriarty had played it safe.

In the meantime Jupiter checked the answering machine. Carefully and without making loud noises, he turned the machine over.

After a good half hour, they had found five 'orange pips'. Moriarty could have been listening to them for the last few days. It could not be ruled out that he had also bugged their homes and cars.

Bob looked at his two friends dejectedly. How could they ensure that Moriarty was not eavesdropping on their conversations? There could be other bugs everywhere. These things were so small that they were completely inconspicuous.

Jupiter sighed. Then he sat down at his desk and wrote something down again:

Not secure here. Could have more bugs—maybe cameras. Check clothes, cars, and homes tonight. Tomorrow we'll meet at another place.

"So, now we're going to work," said Jupiter, when his friends had read the message. "I promised Aunt Mathilda that I would finally mulch the sawed-off branches from the bushes at the salvage yard fence."

"Really?" Pete wondered.

"Yes, really!" Jupiter replied gruffly.

Uncle Titus had purchased an old garden mulcher the week before to churn branches into wood mulch. The deafening noise was just what Jupiter needed when he wanted to discuss the case with his friends.

Together they went to the back of the salvage yard where the machine was located. Uncle Titus had already had a pile of tree branches there.

“Watch out, this thing is treacherous!” Jupiter threw the mulcher on. The motor gave off a hideous rattling sound. “The machine is in no way inferior to the worst criminal bosses when it comes to removing fingers.” He handed Pete a pair of protective gloves. “Try it!”

“The noise is too loud!” Bob shouted as the first branch was pushed through the mulcher. He pressed his hands to his ears.

“We take turns at the machine!” cried Jupiter. He put some earmuffs on Pete, which had been lying on the ground next to the machine. “You take the first shift!”

“What?” Pete yelled back.

“You take the first shift!”

“I can’t hear you.”

“You take over...” Jupiter waved and pointed to the mulcher. Then he grabbed Bob by the arm and led him a few metres away. “It’s still loud enough here. I don’t think the bugs will be able to handle the noise.”

“I don’t think I can think when this machine is running near me!” mumbled Bob. “The noise gives me a headache!”

Jupiter, on the other hand, did not allow himself to be distracted by the noise. On the contrary, Bob thought he saw fighting spirit flaring up in his friend’s eyes.

Jupiter pulled out the wrinkled note with the coded message. “So, ‘W’ flees New York and leaves a mystery behind for a friend. He assumes that his friend understands the words because he is probably also an expert on Sherlock Holmes.”

“I hope all this refers to the stories of Doyle!” Bob opened a folder. “The ‘woman you respect’ thing doesn’t sound like Sherlock Holmes at all. He didn’t have a wife!” He flipped through the essays that Professor Heathcliff had given them.

“What is this?” Jupiter reached over Bob’s arm and grabbed a page. “This is the list of Sherlock Holmes’s stories... Look! Every case has an abbreviation, just as Professor Heathcliff explained to us earlier!”

“What?” Bob put a hand to his ear.

Jupiter leaned forward and repeated the sentence.

“Oh, the abbreviations. So?” Bob scratched his head.

“For example, ABBE is for *Abbey Grange* and WIST for *Wisteria Lodge*.”

“Well, that makes it easier for analysts... but how does this help us?”

“What?” Now Jupiter had hardly heard his friend.

Bob rolled his eyes. “I said how does this help us.” He fervently hoped that they would soon be able to work inside Headquarters again. Only Pete seemed to enjoy working at the mulcher. Eagerly he pushed one branch after the other into the machine.

“Look at the message from ‘W’, Bob!” Jupiter tore his friend from his thoughts. “Here! He writes: ‘Now look between card and copp, to get to the final clue.’”

“I had thought that ‘copp’ is a slang term for the word ‘buy’ or ‘acquire’,” Bob said. “Both ‘card’ and ‘copp’ are written in lower case letters.”

“Yes, perhaps the letter writer did not want these two words to be too obvious,” Jupiter said, “only now, they are not words but abbreviations!”

“So you think that ‘card’ and ‘copp’ are abbreviations for titles of two of the Holmes stories?”

“It’s obvious, isn’t it?” Jupiter pointed to the alphabetical list. “CARD stands for *The Cardboard Box* and COPP is for *The Copper Beeches*... and between CARD and COPP is another story, namely CHAS—*Charles Augustus Milverton*.”

“The story title is a name!” Bob looked excitedly over at Pete, who was still stuffing branches into the machine as if he was being princely paid for it. “—And ‘W’ adds that ‘the

last is all that matters, but choose the one that is true.””

“He means either the last letter or the last name.”

“So it’s either ‘n’ or ‘Milverton’.”

“Right, but I rather assume the name. Ideally, we would have a city and a name,” said Jupiter. “I wouldn’t be surprised if the other verses point to a street and a house number.”

“Right! ‘W’ gives his friend the clues to find him.”

“We’d better get back to Pete now,” Jupe said.

The Second Investigator flinched when the First Investigator touched him on the shoulder.

“That thing almost got me!” He pointed to the remains of the protective glove, which lay on the pile of wood shavings. The machine had shredded the solid leather into tiny pieces.

“Well, you’re lucky!” Bob remarked. “All of your fingers are still intact.”

“Yes, for now, but just wait till Moriarty is done with us. Besides, it’s your turn now!” Pete held out the earmuffs to his friends. “I don’t think I want to do this anymore.”

“Then Bob will continue the mulching!” Jupiter decided. He pushed another branch into the machine so that the noise did not stop.

“We’re not getting anywhere like this.” Bob shook his head. “I already have a ringing in my ear canal. It interrupts all my thoughts. Besides, I have to go home now as I have to mow the lawn before dinner.”

“What about the case?” Pete was brushing dust out of his hair.

“Meet me in the shed on Coldwell Hill tomorrow morning at nine o’clock,” Jupiter said loudly against the noise. Then the branch was through and all they could hear was the chugging of the motor.

“Push another branch in!” said Jupiter.

Sighing, Pete did as he was told.

“Moriarty knows our trailer, but he can’t possibly know about the shed.”

The First Investigator was referring to an old shed situated a short distance across the street from the salvage yard. There was a footpath to the lookout point on Coldwell Hill. Just ahead was a plot of land, abandoned for years, where the remains of a demolished house stood. The shed behind the pile of rubble, however, was still intact, but slowly rotting in the sea air. It was quite possible that the shed was the only nearby place where they were safe from Moriarty’s surveillance and eavesdropping.

“Make sure that you are not being followed!” Jupe added. “Please do not take your cars, but try to switch to other vehicles, and approach the shed from the back road. Until then, we’ll read all the information about Sherlock Holmes that Professor Heathcliff has given us. I will also try to call New York from a more secure phone elsewhere.”

“And what is this secure phone?” Pete asked as quietly as possible.

“I’ll tell you tomorrow.” Jupiter went over to the machine and shut it down. “See you then.”

“Take care of yourself,” Pete said.

“I will,” Jupiter replied.

7. Silver Blaze

Jupiter felt as if he was exhausted when he went over to the Jones family home. This was a two-storey house situated just outside the salvage yard, with a small gate separating them.

In the hallway, he glanced at his reflection on the mirror. Aunt Mathilda was right—he was pale. The four-day pumpkin diet had left its mark.

“Would you like something to eat?” cried his aunt from the kitchen.

“Yes, I’d love to.” Jupiter decided that the current circumstances were against his diet.

Together they set the table. None of them said a word. Jupiter wondered whether he should tell Aunt Mathilda that Uncle Titus was detained by the police because of him. After all, it was a warning to Jupiter that Uncle Titus had to pay for. However, it didn’t take him long to decide against bringing up the subject. Aunt Mathilda would worry unnecessarily and maybe she would also be angry because he had caused the trouble by his investigation work.

“I actually wanted to make steaks and potatoes tonight because Titus had asked for them,” Mathilda said with a sigh. “I wonder what Titus will get in the holding cell? I hope they don’t let him starve there!”

“They will definitely give him something to eat.” Jupiter tried to comfort his aunt.

“You’re a good boy!” She put four thickly topped halves of bread on his plate.

“Thank you,” said the First Investigator. He devoured the meal within a very short time and even had a second helping.

While he chewed, Aunt Mathilda sat silently in front of her plate and did not touch the food. Now and then, she sighed softly.

Jupiter tried to distract himself with the further planning of the investigation. After all, there was still some work to be done. First, he had to check his clothes for bugs. Then he had to make a phone call. However, he could not take the chance of using any of the phones in his house or at the salvage yard, in case they were all tapped. That applied to mobile phones and e-mail as well! Who knew how influential Moriarty could be?

“I’m going back to my room,” said Jupiter, after he had eaten the last crumbs and washed the plates.

“Do that. I’m gonna try to watch some TV.” Aunt Mathilda got up and went into the living room.

Lost in thought, the First Investigator went up the stairs to his room. After closing his door, he thoroughly examined his shirt, trousers and even his shoes. Nowhere was a transmitter or bug hidden.

Jupiter was relieved... but the relief did not last long. He had to leave the house unseen to get to a phone. New York was a few hours ahead, as the city was in a different time zone. There was certainly nobody left at the university whom he could call, but Jupiter had already come up with another plan. It was assumed that Moriarty had the salvage yard area under surveillance. The small bugs didn’t have much range. So to listen in, the eavesdroppers had to be close by.

Jupiter wrote a small note for Aunt Mathilda and put it on his bed—in case she looked for him. Then he left his room and went to the attic where Aunt Mathilda kept her old household utensils. Here there was a small window from which Jupiter had sometimes

climbed onto a tree as a child. The First Investigator fervently hoped that he still fitted through the window—and that the tree would still be able to carry his weight.

He pushed the window up and looked out. It was already dark. Luckily, this external part of the house was not lit. Jupiter would be able to climb down the tree unseen and sneak out to the street... but he had to get onto the tree first!

Jupiter did not want to look down. Had the tree always been this high? His fingers felt for the branches. Then he squeezed through the window. With his recent attempt at dieting, at least he was not in one of his grossly overweight phases.

With a queasy feeling in his stomach, he began his descent. He would have loved to close his eyes. He thought with horror that he would have to climb up the tree later... but now, he had to suppress that thought.

When he finally felt the ground under his feet, he was relieved. Now all he had to do was leave the house compound. That was much easier than climbing down a tree.

Under cover of darkness, he crept to the small road that ran behind the salvage yard. Far and wide, there was no car to be seen. If the salvage yard was under surveillance by Moriarty, he should have escaped unseen.

For the first time that day, Jupiter felt something like good humour. With quick steps, he took the path towards the sea. From here he could walk to Silver Blaze—a pub where he knew he could enter by the back door to get to a pay phone. Furthermore, this pub was where Moriarty certainly would not suspect him to go to as it had ID checks—only because alcohol was served around the clock. However, Jupiter knew the owner anyway, because some time ago, Uncle Titus bought a couple of old tables and barstools from him, and Jupiter had gone there to collect the furniture.

The First Investigator climbed over a low fence and crouched down in the backyard of the bar. From inside, the basses of a Joe Cocker song resounded to him. Jupiter went to the metal door that led to the corridor with the toilets and the drinks storeroom. It was not locked. Smoky air struck him. There was clapping in the tap room. Apparently there was a live performance on the small stage. All the better!

Nobody paid attention to Jupiter, who was hiding behind a coat rack. From here he could inconspicuously operate the telephone, which hung in a small niche on the wall. Jupiter dug a few coins out of his trouser pocket, then grabbed the phone with one hand and keyed in a number with the other.

It rang several times, then a deep male voice announced itself: “Samuel Reynolds, good evening.”

“Hello Chief Reynolds! This is Jupiter Jones,” whispered the First Investigator into the mouthpiece.

“Jupiter! What a surprise!” came the response.

Samuel Reynolds was the former chief of police of Rocky Beach. He had known The Three Investigators since the start of their investigation agency. Now that he had retired, the three boys still called and referred to him as ‘Chief Reynolds’. Most of all, they had never forgotten that the former chief had so many times helped them and got them out of trouble. Since retirement, Reynolds was much more relaxed with their investigations than before.

“I have a small problem, sir,” Jupiter said quietly.

“Where are you anyway?” Reynolds asked. The guys in the taproom applauded again. The First Investigator peered through between the jackets.

“You know what, I’d rather not know!” Reynolds quickly added.

“We got into something,” Jupiter began. Then he told the former police chief in brief what had happened. Finally he came to his request: “Since I have to avoid making calls from

my mobile or home phone, I would need someone to call New York tomorrow and ask about this missing Lester Price.”

“And is that what I should do?” Reynolds asked.

“It would help us a lot.”

“Honestly, it sounds like I should be worried about you guys. Are you sure you don’t want to go to the police?”

“Yes, sir. As long as Inspector Cotta is on leave, you’re the only one we can trust.”

“The only problem is that I no longer have authority,” Reynolds clarified, “but even if I help you in private, there are some difficulties, for example, I can’t just call you back as soon as I find something out. If you’re being bugged, Moriarty will get suspicious the moment I give you the information.”

“Couldn’t you come to the salvage yard disguised as a customer and somehow slip me the results?” asked Jupiter. He was aware that this was a big request, but on the other hand, he knew that Reynolds missed police work and still felt far too fit for retirement.

As hoped, Reynolds agreed. “I’ll come by your place tomorrow afternoon around 4 pm.”

“Thank you very much.”

“Jupiter?”

“Yeah?”

“Keep me informed.”

“We’ll do that, sir!”

“And another thing!”

“What’s that?”

“Wherever you are, get out of there.” Reynolds laughed and hung up.

8. The Solitary Cyclist

After leaving the salvage yard, Pete Crenshaw had gone to visit his girlfriend Kelly Madigan.

It was not until around 10 pm that he swung onto the saddle of his racing bike. He was in a bad mood because Kelly had beaten him five times at card games. Pete was so busy thinking that he only noticed a few streets before his house that something was wrong.

A car followed him. It was a green Pontiac and several people were sitting in it—people whose faces Pete couldn't recognize. He felt a slight tingling in his stomach. If those were Moriarty's men, he was in great danger! Pete took it up a notch.

Before he could turn into his street, he had to pass a lonely pine grove. It was a rather dark stretch of road and he was a solitary cyclist at this time of the night.

Pete had hated this section as a child. On Halloween, older neighbourhood children had dressed up as ghosts and frightened everyone who came along the way. Of course, Pete didn't let himself be frightened by a sheet and a flashlight anymore, but he still found the woods a bit spooky.

He pedalled faster. The car behind him also accelerated. Pete shifted into the next gear. He now felt really queasy. Maybe the arrest of Uncle Titus had only been the first part of the warning and now Moriarty was coming after him!

Pete looked down at his fingers. "It was good to have had you for all these years," he murmured. Then he became angry. Why was nobody out at this time of night? And why hadn't the dark grove been cleared long ago and turned into a park?

The Second Investigator wondered whether it was safer to simply ring the bell at one of the neighbouring houses, but he had just passed the last house before the grove. There was no time to make a decision anyway.

Suddenly, the car overtook Pete. Then it turned sharply and cut off the path of the Second Investigator. Pete had to brake abruptly to avoid crashing into the side of the Pontiac with full force. Gravel splashed up. Pete grabbed the handlebars tightly and turned his bike around.

No sooner had he regained control of his bicycle than the rear doors of the car opened. Two people dressed in black with hooded faces jumped out and ran towards him.

Without hesitation, Pete dropped the bike and sprinted through the woods. If he was fast enough, he could outrun his pursuers in the dark. After all, he was sporty and knew the area.

He hurried through the narrow pine trees towards his house. There were no lights from the other houses, but the full moon illuminated Pete's path.

Just when he felt safe, he heard branches cracking behind him. Then he heard the rattling breath of a man. The pursuers were still after him and they had caught up!

"Stop, stop! Or I'll shoot!" cried the man with a deep, rough voice.

Pete turned around hastily and saw that the man was holding a gun in his hand. The cold metal flashed in the moonlight.

Pete hesitated for a moment, torn between fleeing and giving up. He shouldn't have done that, because the second man had already caught up with him and threw himself on the Second Investigator. As he fell, Pete's left shoulder hit against a pine tree. Hastily he picked himself up.

"Hold still!" the man with the gun warned the Second Investigator.

"What do you want from me?" cried Pete, more angry than frightened. He clenched his hands into fists.

"Shut up!" The man pulled something from his pocket. Pete frantically took a step back and bumped into the pine tree again.

"Stop! Or do you want a load of lead?" The man with the gun had the barrel pointed again at the Second Investigator. He was getting closer. "On the ground, now!"

Pete got down on his knees. There was nothing else he could do.

"Close your eyes."

"But—"

"Can you not hear? I said close your eyes."

The Second Investigator took a deep breath to calm down... but it did not work. What was about to happen to him? If he was lucky, Moriarty's men did not kill him immediately. Perhaps they wanted to capture him and were content to just send Jupiter a finger.

Pete imagined the First Investigator opening the parcel. In his mind's eye, he saw the horror on his friend's face. "Our Second Investigator had foreseen this," said Jupiter in Pete's mind. "How could I ignore his warning!"

"Hurry up," growled the man with the gun.

Pete reluctantly closed his eyes. Now he could only hear the attackers... and smell! The latter was anything but pleasant. He didn't smell sweat or aftershave, but something much more disturbing. It was a sweetish smell that was frighteningly familiar to him—chloroform! This was not the first time he had been stunned with this stuff... and now it was going to happen again.

Before the Second Investigator could react, his pursuers had already pressed the soaked cloth into his face.

Pete tried to resist, but the fumes were already doing their work. His arms and legs felt like lead. He tried to move his fingers, but he could no longer feel them. There was only an icy cold sensation that slowly crawled up to him and befogged him.

'That was it,' Pete thought as he lost consciousness.

9. Charles Augustus Milverton

Bob pushed his bicycle behind a bush on the back road leading to the Coldwell Hill shed. The shed stood abandoned in the morning sun. Nowhere was anything moving.

Bob was satisfied. He had got on his bike unnoticed and made a few detours through pedestrian zones and side streets before getting to the shed. He was sure no one had followed him.

After locking his bike, Bob shouldered his backpack and quickly walked between the bushes to the shed.

"I'm glad you're finally here!" Jupiter said as Bob appeared. "I've been waiting for you for twenty minutes."

"Isn't Pete here yet?" Bob asked as he put down his backpack.

"No." Jupiter grumbled. "He is late again."

"He'll probably take a diversion to lose any potential pursuers." Bob said. "That's the way I did it, and I came from the back road."

Bob then looked around the old shed for something to sit on. Among a stack of old newspapers, a broken umbrella, a few fruit crates and lots of cobwebs, was a motorbike.

It was Jupiter's motorbike. Some time ago, he had bought this used vehicle and repaired it together with his cousin Ty Cassey. However, Aunt Mathilda had forbidden him to ride it, and he was supposed to get rid of it. However, without her knowing, Jupe had hidden it here in the old shed.

Finally, Bob found an old orange crate, overturned it, and sat on it.

"Even though Pete is not here yet, we should start the meeting. I have a lot to report!" The First Investigator told Bob what had happened last night.

"Does this mean that Chief Reynolds will help us?" said Bob as Jupiter finished his report.

"Yes... at least as far as getting information is concerned. We can't do that without causing a stir."

"Frankly, I'm glad you're not going to solve this case completely without help." Bob sounded relieved. Then he sat straight up. "Was that a car engine?"

The boys listened. A car was actually approaching. Jupiter peered through a knothole. "It's a yellow sports car... coming from the back road."

"I wonder if they've spotted us." Bob was queasy.

"The car is moving on," said Jupiter. Bob relaxed a little again.

Jupiter peered further out. "No, wait! I think it's parked behind the bushes."

"Moriarty's people after all! How could they find us here? Do you think they followed you from the salvage yard?"

"Absolutely not!" The First Investigator squinting his eyes together. "Someone is approaching the shed."

"We must have missed a bug," Bob feared. "They know where we are now, and they're gonna get us!"

Jupiter grinned. "That guy is coming straight at us!"

"How can you be so calm?" Bob looked around for a weapon—a wooden pole or something. There must be something he could use to fight off the intruder! Eventually, he picked up the old umbrella.

Bob heard someone coming up to the door. Jupiter calmly walked over and opened it. Then he said: "Hello, Pete! It's about time you got here!"

"Pete?" Bob uttered a sigh of relief. "Jupe! Why didn't you say so?"

"You didn't ask who I saw outside."

Pete stepped into the shed—and saw Bob holding the umbrella in his hand.

"What do you want to do with that?" asked Pete.

"I thought you are one of Moriarty's people."

"You want to protect yourself with an umbrella?"

"There was nothing else I could find... but obviously I don't have to use it." Now Bob had to grin. "Never mind. Let's get on with the meeting."

"You're late!" Jupe admonished the Second Investigator.

"I have my reasons!" Pete dropped himself on another box. It cracked, then it collapsed under his weight. "Sheesh! Everything in here is rotten."

"Whose yellow sports car is that?" asked Bob as Pete freed himself from the wreckage of the crate.

"That is Jeffrey's Camaro. We spontaneously switched cars. It's safer that way."

"Good idea!" praised Jupiter. "—And nice of Jeffrey to lend you his car. He's really starting to like us."

"Oh, he always wanted to drive my MG. He likes British cars." Pete knocked dust off his trousers. "By the way, I got mugged yesterday!"

"What?" Bob stared at him in awe. "And you're just saying this now? You're even worse than Jupe on that score!"

"Nothing happened."

"Nothing happened?" Jupiter made a sceptical face.

"I was first pursued in the pine grove in our block by two masked men and then stunned with chloroform. A little later, I woke up at the same place."

"They probably put a bug on your clothes," Bob said excitedly, "or gave you a message!"

"No, there was nothing!" Pete shook his head. "I went through my clothes and bike thoroughly, not even in my underwear. There were no bugs, no transmitters and no message from Moriarty."

"That doesn't make any sense!" Jupiter pinched his lower lip—a sign that he was thinking hard. "And you noticed nothing strange?"

"No! My left shoulder hurts a little." Pete stretched. "I must have hurt myself when those two thugs were chasing after me last night."

"Are you sure you didn't find a bug?"

"I told you so, Bob! I looked very hard."

"We're not getting anywhere like this," Jupiter interrupted the two. "We don't have much time and there is a puzzle to solve."

"This night attack is part of the mystery," Pete said indignantly. "In any case, I find it quite puzzling that I was attacked just like that for no reason."

"I'd say it's business as usual," Bob remarked. "After all, it's not the first time we've been in a bind." He took his notebook out of his backpack. "Can I share my findings now?"

"Go ahead!" he was encouraged by Jupiter.

"Well, I was reading the commentary and analysis of Doyle's *The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton* last night before going to bed. The case revolves around a blackmailer

who is finally murdered by one of his victims. Incidentally, Doyle created Milverton based on a real blackmailer of the time.”

“Thanks, Bob, we’ll see if this helps.” Jupiter put the note with the mysterious message on another crate that served as a table. “I thought about it again this morning. ‘W’ mentions a city and a name, and then he talks about the ‘need to go on a long road’. This could be the clue to a road name.”

“‘You need to go on a long road’,” Bob quoted the letter writer.

“But what’s this about meeting ‘the woman you respect’ and ‘in our language, you greet her’?” Pete scratched his neck nervously.

“It could be a friend of the real recipient,” Bob surmised, “maybe she lives on that ‘long road’ in Los Angeles.”

“—Or this woman could be another character from the Sherlock Holmes stories,” Jupiter suggested.

“Well, Sherlock Holmes was a bachelor all his life.” Bob looked at his notebook. “—But he had an opponent who, to say the least, impressed him greatly. Her name was Irene Adler. Professor Heathcliff herself looked into Adler’s role and analyzed her relationship with Sherlock Holmes. After all, Holmes respected Adler, if only because she was the only woman who could ever defeat him.”

“If the letter writer really does mean Irene Adler, that is not a hint of a street name,” Pete said, “at least I don’t know that there is an ‘Irene Adler Street’ in Los Angeles.”

“But then there’s the issue of greeting her ‘in our language’,” Bob said.

“The language of Watson and Holmes is English,” said Jupiter thoughtfully. “‘Irene’ is a common first name among English speakers, so perhaps ‘Adler’ is the clue.”

“There was something about that in Professor Heathcliff’s essay,” cried Bob. “Although Irene Adler was an American in the story, she had a career as an opera singer in continental Europe before moving to England. Her surname could be German... and ‘Adler’ in German means ‘eagle’.”

“Eagle!” cried Pete. “Then this could be Eagle Street in Los Angeles. It’s really a ‘long road’, because Eagle Street runs through several blocks... This must be the solution!”

“Great, then we have the complete address of our mysterious Mr Milverton,” Bob rejoiced.

“Not quite yet,” Jupiter objected. “We don’t have the house number.” He looked down at the message again. “As Pete said, Eagle Street is very long. We don’t have that much time, so we have to figure out the correct house number right now.”

“There are other ways to find a house number.” Bob said. “What’s the phone book for?”

“Do you have one here?” Pete looked around.

“Why should we have a phone book here in the shed?” Bob said. “There is no phone here!”

“I just thought—”

“No, there is no phone book here,” Jupiter added, “and I didn’t bring one either. A printed book won’t help us anyway. They are only updated annually. That’s why there are White Pages on the Internet. If Milverton is registered, he should be listed in there, unless he opted to be unlisted.”

“So why don’t you use your mobile phone to search the Internet White Pages right now?” Pete asked.

“Yes, but don’t forget that Moriarty could be tapping on our mobile phones,” Jupe said. “Who knows how far he would go to monitor us?”

"Agreed, but checking for the address of Milverton is in line with his assignment for us," Pete argued, "and as long as we stick to it, it wouldn't matter if he spied on us, right?"

"True to a certain extent," Jupiter said, "but there is another point we have to consider—I do not want Moriarty to just tap the information off us. We should not just locate Lester Price for him before knowing who he is and what he wants to do with Price. So even if we manage to get the required information, I wouldn't just give it to Moriarty, rather, I would hold on to it and look at the situation. I might even have to use what we have to strike a deal with him."

"Okay, you have a point there," Pete agreed.

"So now, we should try to work out the house number," Jupe continued, "and if necessary, we can go to a library to access the Internet White Pages and see if there's someone named Milverton on Eagle Street."

"The number is probably in the poem as well. There's not much left." Pete read out the passage:

*It's our crazy beginning;
But not the month, and not the day.
Ignore, when infinity stands;
Three remains to show you the way.*

"I could imagine that this refers to the date of the 'crazy beginning,'" said Bob. "Removing the month and the day, what is left is the year."

"A year has four digits," Pete added. "'Three remains' could well mean to cross out one digit of the year to leave three. Then you have the three-digit number of the house where Milverton lives."

"Indeed," said Jupiter.

Bob scribbled with his pencil in the notebook. "If there is a year that refers to Holmes, it could be 1881. That's when Holmes and Watson met—a significant and perhaps 'crazy beginning' of a partnership."

"It could also have been 1854, the year Holmes was born," Jupiter suggested. "I just wonder why 'W' is talking about a 'crazy beginning'."

"Don't forget to 'ignore, when infinity stands,'" Pete added, "whatever that means."

"That is no longer a mystery, at least not to me, given the information. Can I borrow your pad?" The First Investigator reached out his hand. Bob handed him his pen and notepad. Jupiter drew a big eight. Then he turned the sheet ninety degrees. "What do you see now?"

"The figure of '8' turned 90 degrees!" Pete replied.

"Any other suggestions?"

"The sign of infinity?" Bob said reluctantly.

"Right! It is the mathematical symbol for infinity," confirmed Jupiter. "If I 'stand' it up, it's again an '8'—as in 'infinity stands'."

"The things you notice!" Pete said, impressed.

Jupiter smiled with satisfaction. "'W' wrote: 'Ignore, when infinity stands' telling that the digit to remove is the '8'."

"But which year should we delete the '8' from? One '8' from 1881 or the one from 1854? And who knows how many other 'crazy beginnings' there are! He could also refer to the publication date of the first book... or the year Holmes met Irene Adler." Pete crossed his hands behind his neck.

"We'll never find Milverton that way," Bob said sullenly.

"Okay," Jupiter agreed, "so we'll now make our way to the library."

“Hopefully, we can then go to this Milverton and ask him what this is all about,” Pete said decisively. He reached for the car key. “What are we waiting for?”

10. The Empty House

At the Rocky Beach Public Library, Bob actually found what he was looking for on the Internet White Pages. Triumphantly, he got back into the Camaro after ten minutes.

“It’s not Charles Augustus, but a James Milverton lives at 162 Eagle Street. That’s three digits without an eight!” Bob squeezed himself laboriously into the narrow back seat of the car between Jeffrey’s numerous surfing equipment.

“So it’s 162,” Pete remarked. “I suppose the year the clue refers to is 1862. What ‘crazy beginning’ occurred for Holmes in 1862?”

“I don’t know,” Bob said. “No time to figure that out. In fact, if it is correct, there is no need to bother about it. In any case, I’d say we’re making great progress on the case right now.”

“I, on the other hand, would say that we are unfortunately being followed,” Jupiter remarked with a glance at the rear-view mirror.

“What?” Bob turned around.

“That green car back there has been following us for the last ten minutes. While you were in the library, it parked a short distance away. As soon as we drove off, it started to move as well. There’s something fishy about it!”

“That’s the Pontiac!” Pete exclaimed. “You know, the one with the people who attacked me at the grove!”

“Well, he won’t get the prize for the most inconspicuous pursuit ever.” Now Bob had also noticed the car. “They’re acting totally conspicuous.”

“Can you lose him?” Jupiter asked nervously.

“I will try.” Pete turned right into a long street and stepped on the accelerator.

“That’s no way to get rid of them. They can see us far too well here,” cried Bob. The green car was still in sight. It followed them with a safe distance of a little over fifty metres.

“Just wait and see!” Pete steered the car into the grounds of a drive-in fast-food restaurant and drove across the car park.

“You don’t really want to eat anything now, do you?” Jupiter asked incredulously.

“No, I just happen to know a very convenient shortcut!” Pete pointed to a narrow driveway to a warehouse. Seeing that there was no car in line, he then drove straight past the ordering post with the microphone and speaker.

A few metres before he reached the food pick-up counter, the Second Investigator turned the steering wheel fully and drove over the pavement and a low kerb onto the driveway. The Three Investigators were given a good shaking. Jupiter bumped his knees roughly against the glove compartment.

“Jeffrey will kill you if he finds out how you treat his car!” Bob burst out. Next to him, tins of surf wax, bathing suits and an expensive-looking pair of sunglasses slipped off the seat.

Pete just grinned and headed for the warehouse.

“You don’t want to go through that!” Jupiter gave his friend a nervous look.

“You bet!” Pete drove through the open hall gate and accelerated again. The sports car whizzed past forklifts and pallets.

“Not so fast!” Bob closed his eyes.

“That’s the way out! Oh, man, this thing goes like a race car!” The car sped out the back gate into the sunlight. “Jeffrey can keep my MG for all I care!”

“Hopefully, things will be better here.” Jupiter didn’t feel at all comfortable in the passenger seat. He would have liked to simply pull the handbrake.

The next moment, the Camaro bumped over another pavement onto a wide road.

“There’s the highway ahead. I’m heading there!” Pete didn’t bother to signal. With a rapid change over three lanes, he turned off. “So, is the other car still following us?”

“I feel sick!” Jupiter reached for the power window switch. “I need fresh air!”

“Is he still there?” the Second Investigator now turned to Bob.

“No. He’s probably circling the warehouse right now.”

“Wonderful, then I’ll take the next exit and go down the back roads to Eagle Street.” Pete got off the highway.

“How they were able to find us is beyond me,” Jupiter said. His face was still pale green.

“Probably some psychics are working for Moriarty,” Pete replied as he finally turned into the target street. “What interests me now is how to find a car park. There’s no parking on the side of the road everywhere. If the Camaro gets towed away at the end of the day, Jeffrey might actually get angry.”

“House Number 162 is over there.” Bob pointed to a little house.

“Pete, why not you go park in one of the side streets,” Jupiter suggested. “Bob and I will go to the house.”

“Fine, but don’t solve the case without me!” Pete let his friends out and then drove on.

“Doesn’t look like a very friendly place here!” Bob remarked as they approached the house. The garden was overgrown and the paint was peeling off the porch.

“Milverton!” Jupiter read the name on an old-fashioned brass plate on the door. “At least it’s the right house.” He rang the bell.

“I wonder if he’ll even open for us,” Bob asked.

They waited... but nothing happened. Jupiter peered through the window. There was no one to be seen inside.

“Now what?” Bob looked around impatiently.

“What do you two want with James?” A chubby woman with a watering can was bending over the hedge of the neighbouring property.

“We wanted to visit a friend who lives here, ma’am!” Jupiter lied. “He gave us this address.”

“Nobody lives here anymore.” The woman waved it off. “James moved into a retirement community in Thousand Oaks a few weeks ago and now he wants to sell the house. Just the other day I said: ‘James, you need to redecorate this place, otherwise no one will buy it.’”

“—And the house isn’t sublet?” Jupiter asked.

“No... I would know!” The neighbour put down her watering can. “The day before yesterday, I was tidying the place for James—really thoroughly, as it should be. I even mopped the floor and cleaned the bathrooms. No one has done that for ages. The house should at least be in good condition inside when the real estate agent comes with the interested parties.”

“Funny. We were so sure our friend lives here.”

“There’s nobody here. I can assure you of that, as I would notice.”

Jupiter immediately believed her. “Then we must be mistaken, ma’am.”

“Well, your friend could have given you a wrong address.” She emptied the watering can and went up the stairs to her front door.

"Thanks for the information!" Jupiter called out to the neighbour. Then he went back to the street together with Bob.

"That can't be!" said the First Investigator quietly as they looked for Pete. "There's only one Milverton on Eagle Street and then it's the wrong house!"

"Maybe our Milverton is not listed in the phone book," Bob suggested, "or maybe he secretly lives in the basement of the house and the neighbour hasn't noticed."

"She seems to be watching her neighbourhood in her spare time," Jupe said.

"Then I'm afraid we'll have to solve this stupid puzzle about the date after all." Bob kicked a rock out of the way. "How troublesome!"

"Even a good investigator must expect setbacks," said Jupiter, "and this is certainly one—especially since we now have to search for Pete and the car." He moaned.

"You're not up to scratch, are you?" Bob said. "Maybe you should lay off that stupid diet."

"That's my business!" Jupe said a bit too unfriendly, but Bob did not hold it against him.

When it came to his weight, Jupiter could sometimes be a bit sensitive. Besides, the First Investigator had just about enough problems. If Uncle Titus was sentenced to prison, it would be a hard blow to the Jones family... and maybe it could also mean the end of the salvage yard. Bob did not want to think about that.

Silently they walked down Eagle Street until they saw the yellow sports car on a side street.

"At last!" Jupiter exclaimed.

"There you are!" Pete looked surprised when his friends came to meet him. "Didn't Milverton want to speak to you?"

"It was the wrong house," Bob said.

"It can't be!" Pete exclaimed.

"Yes, it can be." Jupiter got into the car. "Come on, let's go. We have to look at all the Holmes essays now."

"Where are we going?" Pete asked.

"Back to the salvage yard," Jupe decided.

"Are you sure we can discuss the essays at—" Pete began but Jupiter stopped him from continuing.

"Sure we can..." Jupe continued and signalled to Bob for a pen and notepad. On the notepad, Jupe wrote:

Careful! Can say anything EXCEPT—

- 1. Our intention to expose M.; and*
- 2. We know we are being bugged!*

Then he handed the message to Pete and Bob looked on as well.

"All right!" Pete started the engine and drove off. "I have an idea... how about I'll drive us to a nice place?"

"Where?" Jupe asked.

"How about Venice Beach?"

"Too many people there."

"Malibu?"

"Not much better."

"Then suggest something!" Pete turned off onto a main road.

"I also think we should head back to the salvage yard." Bob looked out the back window.

“Why? Then the stupid pursuers will find us faster.”

“It doesn’t matter.” Bob turned back to his friends. “—Because they’ve already found us. Fellas, we’re being followed by that green car again!”

“The sight of the Pontiac seems almost familiar to me,” muttered Pete.

“Off to the salvage yard then,” Jupiter sighed with a glance at the clock. “The timing is just about right, as I’m expecting a customer there.”

11. The Crooked Man

"Any news of Uncle Titus?" Jupiter asked when The Three Investigators were back at the salvage yard.

Aunt Mathilda shook her head. "The lawyer said it might not look good. For now, we have no choice but to wait." She sighed. "I would so like to visit him, but that rude policeman said it was not allowed."

"As soon as Inspector Cotta returns from his holiday, he will attend to Uncle Titus, and I'm sure we'll be allowed to see him then," Jupiter said as cheerfully as he could.

"I don't know how we're going to run the salvage yard without him!" Aunt Mathilda looked over the mountains of junk piled before her.

"Now we are here, I'd say you go back to the house and lie down on the sofa for an hour and we'll take over running the business. We'll close up a little earlier this evening." Jupiter pushed his aunt gently but firmly towards the house.

When Aunt Mathilda was out of earshot, Bob said: "Have you forgotten that we have a case?"

"No way!" Jupiter crossed his arms. "—But we have to attend to the customers first." He emphasized the last word most conspicuously.

"Right!" Bob nodded. "Customers." He had understood. Jupiter wanted to keep the salvage yard open so Chief Reynolds could slip them the information unnoticed.

"We might as well just close up now." Pete didn't seem to get the hint.

"The customer is king—even in hard times," Jupiter said, "and until someone comes, we can repair the old chairs here."

In fact, they did not have to wait long. Just before four o'clock, a man wearing a Hawaiian shirt, brightly coloured shorts, and a no less colourful baseball cap arrived. He swung a printed jute bag and looked around in a good mood.

"I'm sure he's looking for unusual things for his hippie pad," said Pete after a cursory glance at the man.

"Do you sell used vases here?" asked the Hawaiian shirt guy as he approached.

"Yes, sir," said Jupiter. The customer was none other than Chief Reynolds. In this outfit, the boys almost didn't recognize him.

"I'm looking for a flower vase... as a gift for a friend," said Chief Reynolds. "I wonder if you could help me."

"Of course. If you'll come with me, please." Jupiter led Reynolds to the shelf where Aunt Mathilda kept the more fragile items.

Reynolds looked at the items at his leisure. Finally he decided on a pretty glass vase that looked antique. "She'll love this."

"Come with me to the office and I'll wrap it up for you, sir." Jupiter took the vase.

In the yard office, he wrapped the vase in newspaper while Reynolds rummaged through his bag.

"That'll be five dollars, sir." Jupiter handed him the package.

With a nimble flick of the wrist, Chief Reynolds pushed a sheet of paper from his pocket onto the desk. Then he paid the five dollars and put the vase in his bag. "Thank you very

much! And have a nice day.”

“I wish you the same, sir.”

When the retired police chief had left the premises, Jupiter pretended to diligently note the revenue in the cash book. In reality, however, he was reading the message from Reynolds:

Dear Jupiter,

As promised, I called New York today and made some enquiries. This Lester Price was actually a student at the Institute for Literary Studies. He lived in the dormitory on campus and never attracted negative attention there.

During the semester break, he and a few friends took on little investigation jobs. My informants said that he mainly shadowed unfaithful spouses and once looked for a missing cat.

Six weeks ago, he disappeared without a trace. His friends said that shortly before, Price had been acting strangely and seemed very nervous. When a fellow student went to his room, it was empty. No one could explain what had happened.

Looking at the facts, I think that Lester Price must have known something that got him into trouble. It must have been serious enough to make him give up his whole life so far.

Should you find Price, you could put him and yourself in great danger! Please be careful!

S.R.

Jupiter looked up from the message. What kind of thing had they got themselves into? His head was buzzing. Whatever they did, Moriarty was one step ahead of them. They had nowhere to turn because Moriarty could apparently eavesdrop and trail them everywhere. Also, they couldn't move fast enough to solve the puzzle.

Jupiter made two photocopies of Reynolds's message and then called for Pete and Bob. “Are you okay?” Pete asked.

“I'm going to close salvage yard in fifteen minutes' time,” said the First Investigator.

“Why?” Pete asked.

“I want to think in peace,” Jupiter replied, and handed his friends the photocopies with a signal to keep quiet.

“And what do we do then?” Bob asked, looking at Reynolds's message.

“You go through all the Holmes essays. I don't need to explain what to look for.”

“And then what?”

“I can't go into more detail,” whispered Jupiter. “You know what to do.”

“Well, I don't think we should take this lightly,” Pete said, thinking about it. “The longer we take, the more uncomfortable it becomes for you. Who knows what Moriarty will do next!”

“I have to put up with that.”

“But—”

“I appreciate your concern for me, but I just can't think of a better solution right now, okay?” Jupiter massaged his temples. “Even a master investigator needs a break.”

“You better get some sleep!” Bob looked at the First Investigator with an encouraging look. “You look like you could use a nap. Pete and I will take care of the essays.”

After serving two customers, Jupiter locked the main gate of the salvage yard and hung a ‘Closed’ sign there. Then he went to the letterbox, collected the mail, and made his way to his house.

Aunt Mathilda was not lying on the sofa. Instead, she was ironing a shirt in the living room. In the background, music was droning from the radio.

“If Titus is to be tried, at least make him look respectable.” She ran the iron vigorously over the fabric. “It’s the least I can do for him.”

No sooner had she spoken than the iron went out with a soft click. So did the radio on the cupboard opposite.

“A power trip! I’ll go check the circuit breaker,” Jupiter said and went to the electrical switchboard.

“Can you turn it back on?” Aunt Mathilda called out.

Jupiter opened the box. “The circuit breakers are on!”

“Strange. How come there’s no electricity in the living room?” Aunt Mathilda pushed the light switch in the hallway. Nothing happened. Even the switch in the kitchen didn’t work. There was no electricity in the whole house.

“This can’t be!” The otherwise resolute Aunt Mathilda was close to tears.

Jupiter looked through the stack of letters. They were mainly invoices addressed to Uncle Titus... and then, there was another scarlet envelope. Jupiter tore it open. A small piece of paper fell out. He picked it up and read the message:

Work faster or it will be dark!

Jupiter knew that it came from Moriarty.

“What is that?” asked Aunt Mathilda.

“Oh, nothing.” Jupiter slipped the note into his trouser pocket. “Just a prank by a classmate.”

Aunt Mathilda did not listen at all. She noticed that the next letter on the stack that Jupiter was holding was a letter from their electrical company. She opened it and read the message aloud:

We are sorry to inform you that we have disconnected the electricity supply to your premises. Despite several payment reminders, and a disconnection warning notice, we still have not received the outstanding payments on your account.

If you want to reconnect your service, please contact us within 10 business days of the disconnection, make arrangements to pay the outstanding amount and the reconnection fee...

Then she looked at Jupiter in a startled look. “But Titus has paid the electricity bills every month! We have always paid! This must be a misunderstanding!”

“What about the reminders?” Jupe asked. “Did you receive reminders or notice of any sort?”

“Absolutely not!” Aunt Mathilda exclaimed. “I have the receipts filed up promptly. You can check if you want!”

“Not necessary,” Jupe said. “I’ll go check if the salvage yard has electricity.”

A minute later, Jupe came back into the living room. “Bad news! The electricity to the salvage yard is also out! I’ll call them now!”

Jupiter got from Aunt Mathilda the folder containing the receipts, got his mobile phone and called the electricity company. After endless waiting loops with annoying music and a

long conversation, the customer service officer could confirm that there was indeed no outstanding amount on their account. Somehow, some records in their computer system were changed that triggered off the disconnection, and the company had to investigate the matter. Regarding reconnection, the lady informed Jupiter that it could only be done the next day at the earliest.

So the First Investigator collected some old oil lamps from the salvage yard and distributed them around the rooms. That way they at least had some light when it got dark.

Finally Jupiter took a family pack of chocolate bars out of the kitchen cupboard and went to his room. He sat down on the bed and bit on the first bar.

What a crooked man Moriarty was! It couldn't go on like this. Jupe had to do something! He couldn't cope with another day with a message from Moriarty—and neither could Aunt Mathilda! The puzzle had to be solved and the man who was responsible for everything had to be arrested!

Jupiter was annoyed with himself. Moriarty was fooling around with him, kicking his butt bit-by-bit every day! Frustrated, Jupiter reached for another chocolate bar again.

After twelve chocolate bars, Jupiter still didn't get a brainstorm, but he was very sick. The First Investigator lay down on his bed between the empty chocolate wrappers. He hadn't felt so miserable for a long time!

He thought of the short story *The Adventure of the Dying Detective* where Holmes was found in his Baker Street apartment by his landlady, lying on his bed with his hands twitching, cheeks flushing and eyes reflecting his bad health. Jupe hoped that he would not be like that. It would only make his aunt more depressed.

Aunt Mathilda was probably sitting in the kitchen in the light of an oil lamp, trying to eat something. Just the thought of food made Jupiter gasp for breath. Maybe it was the many chocolate bars that were to blame or simply Jupiter's exhaustion.

At some point, sleep overcame him...

12. A Case of Identity

Confused fragments of dreams haunted Jupiter. He spoke to Sherlock Holmes and asked him about Irene Adler's house on Eagle Street. Then Jeffrey suddenly stood at the door and said he would take Pete's place in The Three Investigators. Distorted music began to play and Jupiter found himself explaining to Bob that Charles Augustus Milverton was going to follow his real-life role model to blackmail Moriarty not for money, but for chocolate bars.

At this point, the First Investigator woke up suddenly. He hardly felt better than before but the dream had made him recall a point that Bob had earlier reported on the Milverton character.

Slowly he stood up. He reached for a box of matches and lit up an oil lamp. Then he grabbed from his desk, the copies of essays obtained from Professor Heathcliff.

Five minutes later, he had found what he was looking for—the commentary on the *Charles Augustus Milverton* story. Jupiter skimmed the text to the point where it described the creation of Milverton:

The art dealer Charles Augustus Howell served as the model for Doyle's Milverton. Just like the literary figure, the real Howell was also a blackmailer.

Happy with himself, Jupiter put the copies back on his desk. 'W' had written: 'choose the one that is true'. He could only have meant the true person behind Charles Augustus Milverton. Someone who was well acquainted with the works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had to know that the Milverton character was based on a real person named 'Charles Augustus Howell'. Also, when 'W' wrote: 'the last is all that matters', he meant the last name. Now Jupiter only had to find a 'Howell' on Eagle Street.

There was no time to waste. However, at this time of night, there was no other convenient place that Jupiter could go to for Internet access. He sneaked downstairs and got hold of Aunt Mathilda's mobile phone... and then he hesitated. What if Moriarty also tapped his aunt's phone? The First Investigator realized that he needed the information right away, so he decided to take a chance and use the phone to search the Internet. Fortunately, the phone battery still had sufficient charge.

Jupiter went to the Internet White Pages page. "Go faster," he told the phone. Finally the page with the search results appeared. "There you go." Jupiter was relieved. He had found him—Edward Howell, 199 Eagle Street, Los Angeles.

The next thing to do was clear—Jupiter had to climb out the attic window again.

After Jupiter had fallen down the tree more than he had climbed down, he staggered over to the fence. No more chocolate, he thought to himself in silence—and never again the pumpkin diet!

The cool night air did him surprisingly good. He felt his spirits slowly return. This time he didn't sneak to Silver Blaze, but towards the dilapidated shed on Coldwell Hill. There, the First Investigator looked around. There was nobody to be seen, so he opened the shed door.

Even though Jupiter had been using his motorbike secretly, he hadn't been able to ride it for the last few weeks. So it could be that Moriarty knew nothing about the existence of the motorbike... and if he didn't know that the motorbike existed, he couldn't plant a tracking device on it.

Jupe pushed the motorbike out of the shed. Then he jumped on the vehicle, revved the engine, and rode off.

Along the way, Jupiter looked at his rear-view mirror every now and then. There was no green car of the pursuers. If Moriarty's spies were tailing him, they did it much more skilfully than in the morning. However, Jupiter was sure that this time they hadn't noticed him leaving on his motorbike.

At Eagle Street, Jupiter stopped in front of a green house with white window frames. On a Mexican tile next to the front door, the number 199 was written in large blue digits.

There was a light on inside the house, so someone was probably there. Jupiter parked the motorbike in the shade of a small tree. Not everyone had to see that Howell had a visitor. Instead of ringing the bell, the First Investigator went around the house. He wanted to get an overview first. The beds in the garden were unplanted—possibly a sign that the house occupant had only just moved in!

Jupiter peered through a window. Inside there was a table, an old sofa and lots of books. They were piled up on the floor, lying on the table, the window sill and the sofa backrest, or they stood on narrow shelves.

Jupiter was about to sneak to the second window when he heard a noise behind him. He turned around hastily—just in time to spot an oversized book rushing down on his head. The impact made him stagger, white stars flashed, then he blacked out.

When Jupiter regained consciousness, he lay on the living room floor between the books. He carefully touched his head. "Ouch!"

"What were you doing in my garden?" a male voice asked. The First Investigator blinked. Someone leaned down to him. Jupiter protected his face with his arms.

"Go ahead, talk."

"Not if you hit me again."

"That depends on your answer."

"I've been looking for you, Mr Price!" Jupiter decided to get straight to the point to reveal his suspicion of the man's identity. He heard the man take a sharp breath.

"You're Lester Price, aren't you?" Carefully, Jupiter sat up. He was a little dizzy. The man lifted the thick book, which he was still holding in his hands.

"*The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of British and American Literary History, Volume Eight.*" The First Investigator rubbed the sore part of his head. "Heavy reading. It really blew my mind."

"What do you want from me?" The man was clearly nervous.

Jupiter stared at him. Price was still young, maybe in his twenties. He had tangled dark hair and was wearing a washed-out T-shirt. The most striking thing about him was a long scar that ran down his forearm to his elbow.

"I want to have a word with you." Jupiter had decided to tell the truth. "My friends and I run a small investigation agency." He took out their business card and handed it to Price who looked intensely at it.

Jupiter continued: "Only recently we solved a case and with that we enraged someone—the boss of a gangland syndicate, of all people. He pressured us and forced an assignment onto us."

"Let me guess—you were supposed to find me."

"Right," Jupe said.

"If you are working for him, how can I trust you?" Price said.

"Before you get the wrong idea, please let me explain..." Jupe replied. "My colleagues and I are amateur junior investigators and we do not do business with criminals. In fact, we work closely with the police in Rocky Beach. The problem is that we were forced into this assignment. It was an extortion. Even with the limited knowledge we have of this case, we have no intention of informing the boss of your whereabouts... rather we want to expose him as a criminal. This is why I have come to look for you... and to warn you as well."

"What do you know about this case?" Price asked.

"We know that the gangland boss had someone intercept the message you wrote to your friend in New York. He knows that the trail leads here to LA, but that's as far as he's got. That's why he hired us to decode the message to reveal your present location. We specialize in puzzles and mysteries of all kinds."

"Great!" The young man pulled his hair up. He didn't sound like he thought the news was great—quite the opposite, in fact. "Do you have any idea what will happen now—now that you've found me? Probably not! But I can tell you—these guys have a hundred ways to protect themselves. They've been monitoring you and your friends with bugs, cameras and tracking devices the whole time. They're gonna mess us up big time. I won't be surprised if they're here in five minutes!"

He looked around frantically. Then he ripped open a drawer. "I knew it! I knew they would find me... but I'm prepared for it!"

Price pulled a gun out of the drawer. With trembling hands, he laboriously unlocked it.

13. The Stockbroker's Clerk

"Just be careful," Jupiter warned. "What good will that do when facing those thugs?"

"I know how to handle this thing!" With his free hand, Price grabbed an already packed travel bag that was standing next to the sofa. "I'm getting out of here. You better get on your way."

"Wait! I was not followed, and there is also no tracking device on me. I searched all my things thoroughly," Jupiter tried to reassure the man.

"Oh, yeah? Are you sure about that?"

"Yes."

"But not me! You know what? In New York, they plant bugs and transmitters everywhere," said Price. His voice rolled over as he talked. "You can't rule out the possibility that they are following you, listening in and checking up on you—every single second!"

"I am not a beginner," the First Investigator said calmly. "My colleagues and I, we have really checked everything. We actually found bugs in our office and there might be some in our houses, but we were careful. We never spoke openly about our investigations... and nobody knows I'm here right now. I really made sure of that."

Lester Price relaxed a little, but he did not put down the gun. "Okay, but I'm gonna call the Marshals Service anyway, okay?"

"The Marshals Service?" Jupiter followed up in surprise. "So you didn't flee New York on your own, but with the help of a witness protection programme?"

"You got it," Price replied. He waved his gun as he talked. Jupiter feared that he might accidentally pull the trigger at any moment. "I did some investigations during the semester break. It was a harmless thing. I was only supposed to follow a husband to check whether he was faithful to his wife. Well, he was faithful, but he was involved in other criminal activities. He worked for George Damian Luca-Postelli, a New York gangland boss. Instead of contacting the police, I kept snooping. Somehow I was hoping to uncover something really big. In fact, I had soon gathered solid evidences on numerous crimes, but then my cover was blown."

"So you turned to the judicial officers and promised to testify against this Luca-Postelli if you are given protection."

"So it was. I had to leave New York immediately. The Marshals made me promise not to tell anyone. They gave me a new name, new ID and a new address. So I came here to LA, rented this place, and for a while, I was lying low. Only recently I got a job as a clerk with a stockbroker. I had to earn some money to keep going and was planning on getting a better-paying job. Now, I guess that will have to change—yet again..."

"As far as I know, the witness protection programme prohibits people from giving out their new address," Jupiter said. "So that was why you left a coded message for your university friend."

"'Sherlock Holmes' is not just a regular friend. She is my very close friend. We have known each other for years. She is also studying literature and sometimes helped me with the investigation. I didn't get a chance to say goodbye to her because she was on a study trip when it all happened."

"So she never got the message," said Jupiter. "Instead, this other gangland boss in California is after you."

"I know!" Price paced back and forth nervously. "I'm practically in the lion's den!"

"In what way?"

Price went to the window and peered out. The street was quiet. He breathed a sigh of relief. "I was in a pub around the corner the other day. There was a television hanging over the bar and there was a programme about equestrian sports. It was one of those local stations, so nothing interesting, I didn't watch most of the time... but then I saw him!"

"Who?"

"A man who did business with Luca-Postelli in New York. I already knew from my investigations that he came from the West Coast, but I didn't know that he lived here in LA, otherwise the Marshals would never have sent me here."

"Do you know the man's name?" Jupiter asked.

"No, Luca-Postelli only referred to him as the 'Englishman'. All I know is that he is involved with horse racing. He was shown at a race track here in LA. Then there were pictures of a big ranch."

"And what does he look like?"

"He is probably in his mid-sixties, has black, greying hair and is in a wheelchair."

"In a wheelchair? Well, that's a bit more obvious. So what did you do after you saw him?"

"I came straight back here and contacted the Marshals. However, they told me not to rush into anything. After all, it was not certain that the man lives here in the LA area. Then they promised me to check it out, but so far I haven't heard anything."

"I fear that this man is indeed in the area... and I wouldn't be surprised if our Moriarty and Luca-Postelli's shady business partner is one and the same person," said Jupiter.

"Moriarty?" asked Price in surprise. "Not the opponent of Sherlock Holmes?"

"I'm afraid it's a long story." Jupiter stood up. "Whoever he is, this man wants to prevent you from testifying in court."

"Well? Will you tell him where I am?" asked Price in a rough voice.

"No. I'll think of something," said Jupiter confidently.

"You have no idea who you're messing with." Lester Price lowered his voice and showed Jupiter his arm. "The scar here is a little message from the gangland, but compared to what these criminals are capable of, this is just a little thing."

He turned back to the window. Jupiter looked out as well. Suddenly he didn't feel so safe anymore. Every shadow out there had something threatening about it. Lester Price's fear was contagious.

"Even Luca-Postelli was in awe of the 'Englishman' and his people spoke of him only in a whisper—as if he were the devil himself."

"I know that Moriarty, or the 'Englishman' as you refer to him, is both influential and dangerous," the First Investigator stated. "Therefore, it would indeed be a good idea for you to change your place of residence. Sooner or later, Moriarty will find you."

"I will speak with the Marshals Service. With any luck, I'll be in another state in two or three days."

Lester Price grabbed his jacket from a chair and took a car key out of one of the pockets. "Until then, I think I'll probably go stay in a motel."

"Yes, it's better for you not to be seen too much in public."

"You better take care of yourself, and your friends," said Price seriously. "If this Moriarty knows who you are and where you live, he has you in his hand. Do not even try to

reveal his identity. He will beat you to it and get you out of the way. Think carefully about what your life is worth.”

“I’ll do that.” Jupiter went to the door. “Oh yes, I have one more question.”

“Which is?”

“What’s with the year 1899?”

“1899?” Price asked. “Why 1899?”

“You gave a clue to the year in your message to Holmes? The one about the ‘crazy beginning’. That was the one thing we couldn’t figure out.”

Price smiled. “Well, that’s the year my detective partner and I solved our first case together.”

“Aha! So do you mean 1998?”

“Yes,” Price replied.

“We wouldn’t have figured that out anyway,” Jupiter said.

“It was a pretty crazy affair but a very significant one for us,” Price continued. “We were successful in the end and felt like true master detectives—just like our great role model Sherlock Holmes.”

When Jupiter was finally back in his bed that night, he could not sleep. He was completely exhausted, but he just couldn’t get to rest.

He had solved the puzzle and found Lester Price. In addition, he now had a clue to Moriarty’s identity, but all this inevitably require further investigations. Jupiter had no choice but to turn Moriarty in. If he did not, the gangland boss would take revenge on him for not completing the assignment. If The Three Investigators had enough evidence against the man, they could testify against him in court to put him in prison... but that was not the end of the matter.

What would come after the trial was clear—the witness protection programme. He, Pete and Bob would move to other states with their families and start a new life there—under different names. They would lose friends and relatives, and they would have to give up their investigation agency. It was also assumed that the Department of Justice would not send them to the same new area. They would be separated, and then Jupiter might never see his two best friends again.

Jupiter buried his head in the pillow. He gritted his teeth. Sherlock Holmes had fought Moriarty at the Reichenbach Falls, but the master detective himself had perished—at least until readers demanded his return.

He, Jupiter Jones, had only one life... and he did not want to surrender to Moriarty so easily.

14. The Red Circle

Around five o'clock in the morning, Jupiter had finally made a decision. First he would lure Moriarty onto a false track. Then he could strike back and expose the gangland boss, even if he had to give up everything for that.

He waited until the sun had risen, then he used his mobile phone to call Bob. His mother picked up the phone. She sounded sleepy when she answered.

"Mrs Andrews! I need to speak to Bob!" Jupiter said briefly.

"Do you know what time it is?" complained Mrs Andrews.

"It's important!" Jupiter just said.

"I'm gonna see if I can wake up Robert." She put the phone down.

Shortly afterwards Jupiter heard a tired "Jupe, what is it?"

"I think we can solve the case!" cried Jupiter cheerfully.

"What?"

"Well, I think we will get on the track of this 'W' after all! Come over here and I will explain it to you! Then we can figure out together what to do next."

Half an hour later, Bob and Pete were standing on the verandah of the Jones home. Both looked pretty sleepy.

"I thought it was a joke when you called," Pete said.

"Not at all."

"What are you doing so early in the morning?" asked Aunt Mathilda as she met the boys in the hallway. She was still wearing her flowered dressing gown.

"Oh, we're meeting out here since there is still no electricity elsewhere," Jupe said.

"No electricity?" Pete wondered. "What happened?"

Jupe briefly explained to his friends about the disconnection issue, but gave them a signal not to question or speculate anything. In any case, Jupe has a pen and notepad with him.

After Aunt Mathilda had gone back into the house, Jupiter told his friends: "Aunt Mathilda had decided not to open the salvage yard for business today since there is no electricity there. That gives us more time to work on the puzzle."

Jupiter then brought out a battery operated radio and switched it on. "Want some music?" He turned up the volume. Then he grabbed the pen and wrote on the notepad:

First, did you check clothes for bugs?

Both nodded.

Shoes?

Pete looked at Bob and shrugged. It was clear to Jupe that they missed inspecting their shoes.

Check now!

Both removed their shoes and checked thoroughly. Less than a minute later, Pete let out a short cry: "Aha!"

On his left sports shoe, there was something on the underneath of the eyestay—the part that held the eyelets in place. It was so thin that it looked just like a red circle impressed on the synthetic leather as part of the design. On closer examination, he saw that the 'red circle' was not part of the fabric but was a flat round object that was stuck there. He then checked his other shoe and found nothing of this sort.

"What is this thing—" Pete began.

Jupe quickly interrupted him with a signal to be quiet. The First Investigator then wrote on the notepad:

Quiet! May be both tracking device and bug. Take it out.

Jupe handed Pete a penknife and Pete carefully pried out the flat and thin object. He passed it on to Jupe, who then wrote on the pad:

Examine later. Wait here!

Jupiter went to the salvage yard and then into Headquarters to put the 'red circle' into the cardboard box with the bugs. Then he rejoined his friends on the verandah.

"Come on, fellas, follow me," Jupe said, took the radio and went into the house. Then he led this two friends upstairs to the bathroom.

"There are no bugs in the bathroom," whispered Jupiter as soon as Bob closed the door behind them. "I have searched everything here. Fortunately there are hardly any hiding places in this room, but we must still be careful."

"Now I'm sure that thing was stuck on my shoe when they knocked me out that night at the grove." Pete said.

"That's why they found us so easy in LA," Bob added "The whole time, they were on your tail—or should I say, on your shoe!"

"And if you had also cycled home alone, you would have been caught too," the Second Investigator remarked. "—But that's how I've been drawing the short straw again. Typical that I get the beating!"

"Anyway, let's get back to the case." Jupiter looked at his two friends seriously. "I solved the puzzle last night and paid a visit to Lester Price."

Bob and Pete looked at him in surprise. "What?"

"Lester Price is in a witness protection programme because he testified against a New York gangland boss. He also has information about his business partners. One of them is none other than our Moriarty. No wonder Price wants to get out of the way."

"So we can't just give Price's address to Moriarty," Bob said. "That would be his death warrant."

"Price is long gone. He's going to get himself a new identity for the second time."

"Then we have no choice but to expose Moriarty," Pete concluded.

"I will try," said Jupiter. "Are you with me?"

"Of course!" his friends replied almost unanimously.

"Even if you have to go into witness protection yourself?"

Pete looked at the First Investigator in horror. "Then I would never see Kelly again, nor Jeffrey... and my friends on the basketball team..."

"Worst case scenario—you'd never see Bob and me again either." Jupiter tried to speak as calmly as possible.

"This is unbelievable!" Pete exclaimed.

"Let Moriarty try and get even," Bob said. "We're not running away."

"Then you'll have to live with Moriarty sending his people after you, or your family members, every other day..." the First Investigator said.

"This is the worst day of my life," Pete said tonelessly. "You successfully survive numerous abductions, car chases and robberies, and then some gangland boss comes along, snaps his finger and ruins everything!."

"I could do this on my own. If I testify alone, you may have nothing to fear." Jupiter sat down on the edge of the bathtub. "Moriarty's after me anyway."

"We're not gonna let that happen." Bob sat down next to the First Investigator. "We're a team, remember?"

"If we're going to testify, let's do it together," Pete agreed.

"Thank you," Jupiter said quietly.

"Now what?" Bob asked.

"Now that we have removed that thing from Pete's shoe," said Jupiter, "we can take a closer look at Moriarty."

"Do you have any idea where he lives?" Bob asked.

"Well, he is obviously so severely disabled that he needs a wheelchair... and he's supposed to own a ranch in the greater Los Angeles area."

"Then Kelly's father could know him." Pete jumped up. "He's a Western fan and knows all the big ranches and stables around here."

"Moriarty, however, does not breed horses. It seems that he is active in racing," Jupiter said. "Anyway, we'll first try to find out ourselves and if necessary, you can ask Kelly's father."

"If we had Internet, it would probably only be a click or two until we found it," Bob thought aloud.

"If he's so wealthy and successful, he's part of what's called high society, isn't he?"

"Yes, but what are you getting at, Pete?"

"I know who could help us!" Pete ran out of the bathroom.

"What's this about?" Bob looked at him.

"I don't know." Jupiter crossed his arms. "He could have told us what he was up to."

"You never do!"

They heard steps on the stairs. Then Pete stepped back into the bathroom, followed by Aunt Mathilda.

"For goodness' sake," she said. "What are you all doing here in the bathroom?"

"It's cooler in here," Bob explained.

Puzzled, Aunt Mathilda looked from one boy to another. "I'll never understand you three, but why did you ask me to come here?"

"You love to read those glossy magazines about the rich and beautiful of Hollywood and the surrounding area, don't you?" Pete asked.

"Well, every now and then I flip through the magazines at the hairdresser. It's interesting to find out what the high society is doing," Aunt Mathilda replied slightly embarrassed.

"Has there ever been talk of a guy who breeds racehorses around here? He may not be handsome, but he's rich."

"Oh, there are many stud farms here," said Aunt Mathilda, "and rich people are a dime a dozen in Los Angeles."

"The person we are looking for is in his mid-sixties and has black, greying hair. He is also in a wheelchair," Jupiter added.

"In a wheelchair?" repeated Aunt Mathilda. "That narrows things down considerably. I suppose there's only one person, the one with the giant estate."

"Do you know his name?"

"I don't remember a first name, but his last name was... hmm... it was a colour... Brown! Or Green?" Aunt Mathilda stared into the bathroom mirror as if her reflection could give her an answer. She drove herself thoughtfully through her pinned-up hair. Then she turned abruptly to the boys. "It was Grey! At the time I thought—the name matches his hair, there's plenty of grey in it too. The newspapers reported on him because he had a rather spectacular riding accident a few years ago. Since then, he hasn't been able to walk properly and is probably in a wheelchair."

"That could be him!"

"Do you know anything more about him?"

"His country house was designed by famous architects in an English style—all very chic," said Aunt Mathilda, "and there was once a report about his house in the magazine *Luxury Living*. It was full of antiques. Your uncle would have been very surprised at all the treasures, but such things are seldom sold to second-hand stores." At the mention of Uncle Titus, a shadow briefly glided across her face, but Aunt Mathilda quickly regained her composure and forced herself to smile.

Jupiter cleared his throat. "Do you have any idea where the estate is?"

"I'll have to think about it."

The boys looked at Jupiter's aunt with excitement. She rubbed her chin. "Wait! I'll have it soon. Yes, I think it is somewhere in the San Fernando Valley."

"It's northeast of Los Angeles."

Aunt Mathilda nodded. "What do you want with this Grey?"

"I'm afraid we can't tell you that right now."

"But—" Aunt Mathilda said.

"It has to do with Uncle Titus," explained Jupe briefly. "If all goes well, you'll get to hear the whole story tonight... but now we don't have the time."

"Something to do with Titus?"

"And with the blackout. By the way, you can do us a big favour. Chief Reynolds will be stopping by later. Please pretend you don't know him because he's posing as a customer. When he has chosen and paid for something, please give him this letter here." Jupiter stood up and pulled a taped and rather creased envelope out of his back pocket.

"Jupe!" His aunt made no effort to receive the letter. "What absurd game are you involved in?"

"It's not a game." Jupiter pressed the letter into her hand. "—But please don't worry. Now we really must go or the plan will fail in the end."

Shortly afterwards, The Three Investigators were back at Headquarters. Jupiter opened the door to the laboratory and brought out the cardboard box containing the bugs. That way, every word they said would get where it was supposed to go—to Moriarty.

"I think I have solved the puzzle," said Jupiter.

"How did you come up with the solution?" asked Bob.

The First Investigator spoke at length about Milverton and Eagle Street—all for Moriarty to hear.

"That's great!" Pete and Bob gave each other unsettled looks. They knew Jupiter was playing a game, but they didn't know where it was going to lead to. So they limited

themselves to nodding and saying “yes” or “oh” from time to time.

Jupiter continued with his flowery story and finally ended up stating the address of the empty house they had visited the day before—162 Eagle Street. “I am quite sure that this ‘W’ from the letter is hiding there, or he has hidden a treasure there. In any case, the solution to the puzzle is an address.”

“So the solution is Milverton, 162 Eagle Street, Los Angeles?” Bob asked apparently knowing that the First Investigator was intentionally feeding Moriarty with the wrong address.

“I’m quite sure of it,” replied Jupiter, clearly audible.

“And what shall we do? Are we going there?” asked Pete.

“I don’t know if Moriarty would like that,” replied Jupiter, “and we also do not know whether this ‘W’ is dangerous. Perhaps he is armed and has set some devious traps.”

“And how are we going to tell Moriarty that we’ve solved the puzzle?” Bob asked, playing along.

“He said he’d know by then.”

“How?”

“Let’s wait and see. Moriarty will certainly get in touch,” said Jupiter.

“Can Pete and I go home now?”

“Oh, well, you’re here now, so we can pass the time together until Moriarty gets in touch. I still have to call a customer who has ordered something from Aunt Mathilda, and then we can have the rest of the day off. Pete, how about we visit your father on his movie set.”

“Good idea,” Pete agreed. “Then we might even get to meet some actors.”

Pete and Bob understood that Jupiter was trying to send Moriarty on a false trail. A few of his men should be on their way to Eagle Street.

However, The Three Investigators would certainly not go visit Pete’s father at the movie set but to San Fernando Valley—to the ranch of Moriarty alias Mr Grey.

15. The Copper Beeches

Jupiter took out his mobile phone and called Chief Reynolds.

“The Jones Salvage Yard. Jupiter Jones speaking,” he said. “You came to us the other day for portable stoves and we had promised to get in touch with you as soon as we got new goods. Sorry that I only called now. We have been very busy here the last few days, but there are a few stoves that might interest you.”

“Shall I come by today?” Reynolds asked. He was into the game.

“Actually we are closed for business today, but stoves are always sold out quickly. I have reserved a couple for you to take a look. If you come today, my aunt will be in the house and will show you the items.”

“I’ll be on my way then,” Reynolds replied. “Thank you for the information.”

“You’re welcome, sir. Have a nice day.” Jupiter hung up.

“Okay, what’s next?” Pete asked.

“Like I suggested earlier,” Jupe replied, “we’ll go visit the movie set.”

Before leaving Headquarters, Jupe gave Bob a watch that he had worked on some time ago. After a video evening watching James Bond movies, the First Investigator had the idea to develop a multi-function watch. For days, he had been sitting at it, converting an ordinary watch into a technical marvel. Embedded in it was a tiny microphone that was capable of capturing high-quality audio and sending it to a receiver. There was also a tracking device inside the watch.

“Now, we’ll go to San Fernando Valley to pay a visit to Mr Grey,” Jupe said as the three of them hurriedly got into Bob’s Beetle and drove off.

“Do you know exactly where the ranch is?” Bob asked.

“Yes, after much difficulty accessing online maps using Aunt Mathilda’s mobile phone,” Jupe replied. “His estate is called ‘Copper Beech Manor’ and it is located on the northern rim of the valley. I have asked Worthington to fetch us there. We have to go to Rent-’n-Ride now!”

Worthington was an English chauffeur who worked for the Rent-’n-Ride Auto Agency. The three boys had known him since they started their investigation agency. Some years ago in a previous case, a generous client had rewarded The Three Investigators by covering all expenses for them to rent the agency’s luxurious Rolls-Royce together with a chauffeur. Over the years, Worthington had become a good friend of the three boys and had helped them on numerous occasions.

“Are we going in the Rolls?” Pete asked.

“No,” Jupe replied. “I called Worthington earlier and asked for his help, but not with the Rolls which is too conspicuous. He will be off duty around now and will wait for us at his office. He’s going to drive us in his own car. In fact, I have planned for him to help us instead of just driving us there.”

Just as they entered the car park of Rent-’n-Ride, Jupe noticed a family of four loading their luggage into the boot of a rental car.

"Wait for me here," Jupe told his friends. "It'll only be for a moment." With that, he crept off inconspicuously towards the car.

A few metres before reaching the rental car, he heard the father say: "Let's go! Let's go! I want to reach San Diego before noon."

"Perfect!" Jupe thought as he walked past the car just after the family had all got in. Then in a quick movement, he bent down seemingly wanting to tie his shoe laces. He got back up before the car reversed out and drove off.

The next moment, he was back with his friends.

"What sinister thing did you just do?" Pete asked.

"I'm sending Grey's goons off to San Diego," Jupe replied.

"How?"

"I stuck that 'red circle' tracking device you found in your shoe underneath the back bumper of that rental car. Anyway, let's go find Worthington now."

At the Rent-'n-Ride office, the English chauffeur was sitting in the staff room, drinking his tea.

"Yes! How can I help you gentlemen this time," he asked as he welcomed The Three Investigators.

"We need to make a distinguished visit to an illustrious client of ours in San Fernando Valley," explained Jupiter. Wordlessly, he handed the chauffeur a small device and a note.

Worthington skimmed over the note and replied: "Very well... if you would please follow me to the car park."

At the staff car park, they got into Worthington's private car—a very well maintained grey Ford—and the chauffeur drove off immediately.

San Fernando Valley was an urbanized valley in Los Angeles County. It was well-known for its iconic movie studios. Many parts of the valley, particularly in the north, were occupied by sprawling, custom-designed ranches on enormous lots, speckled with trees.

When Worthington dropped The Three Investigators off at the gate of Grey's property, it was also clear to them why the ranch was so well known in the area.

The manor house stood out clearly from the usual riding stables and breeding farms. Everything was bigger and nobler. Giant marble lions sat on the stone gate posts. The wide driveway leading to the house was strewn with white gravel and led between extensive green pastures with high white fences along to a residential house and several stables. The buildings looked as if they came straight out of a movie about old aristocratic houses in England.

"Oh, this guy must have real money," Pete marvelled. "You'd think there was some fancy lord living here."

"Very noble indeed!" Bob agreed with him.

"I will not be intimidated by this!" said Jupiter. "Bob, is everything ready with your watch?"

"Everything is ready."

"Fine, from now on we'll record every word!" Determined, he headed for the large house that lay at the end of the gravel path between two majestic copper beeches.

"Are you just going to ring the bell?" Pete hesitated as they reached the stairs leading up to the massive front door.

Instead of answering, Jupiter pulled an old-fashioned bell pull. A chime sounded in the house.

“Maybe there’s no one in.” Bob nervously rubbed his hands.

However, the boys did not have to wait long. A white-haired butler in a black suit and white gloves opened the door.

“Yes?” he asked with an English accent.

Pete involuntarily had to think of a penguin. He denied himself a laugh.

“We would like to see Mr Grey,” explained Jupiter.

“Do you have an appointment?”

“No, but I’m sure Mr Grey has an interest in welcoming us,” replied Jupiter confidently.

“Do you gentlemen have a card I can present?”

“Of course.” Jupiter promptly handed the butler the business card of The Three Investigators.

The butler accepted the card and placed it on a silver tray. “If I could ask you to wait a moment, please.” He then closed the door.

“Oh man, I don’t have a good feeling about this!” mumbled Pete. “I have no desire to end up buried here under the copper beeches or being used as horse feed.”

“Horses are vegetarians, Pete,” Bob tried to reassure his friend.

“Not quite.” Jupiter turned to his colleagues. “In Iceland, horses are occasionally fed fish in addition to their vegetable feed.”

However, he didn’t get around to expanding the information into a lecture because the door was already open again. “Please come in. My master will receive you.”

The butler led The Three Investigators through a magnificent entrance hall, in which an old-fashioned chandelier was hanging. Then they went through a long corridor to the right into a windowless room. There was nobody there. Pete and Bob looked at each other nervously.

“If I could please search the gentlemen,” said the butler in a nasal tone of voice.

“Excuse me?” Pete asked.

“I can’t possibly take you to my master like this. You might be armed.”

“There you go, take a look.” Pete spread his arms.

“Please remove your mobile phones and watches...” the butler instructed, “and place them in this tray.”

Jupiter flinched when Bob took off his watch.

“Hey, I can hardly attack your master with that,” Bob was indignant.

“Orders from above,” the butler just said. Then he surprised the three of them by taking out a hand-held metal detector wand and started scanning the three boys with it.

“Is this an airport?” Pete quipped, annoyed.

The butler ignored the remark, and after the scanning, he continued to do a pat-down search.

“You better hurry up as my plane is about to take off!” Pete was now really annoyed.

The butler did it surprisingly quickly. Obviously, this wasn’t the first time the man had done this.

“Can I take my watch back?” Bob asked.

“Yes, but the mobile phones stay here,” the butler said. “You’ll get them back when you leave.”

“My goodness!” Pete remarked.

When Bob put his watch back on, Jupiter was visibly relieved.

“Come on!” The butler led them back into the corridor and from there into a large, wood-panelled study. Behind an enormous desk was a thin man on a wheelchair. “Ah, gentlemen investigators... please come closer.” He too, spoke with an English accent.

"Good afternoon, Mr Grey," Jupiter said, "or would you prefer I call you Professor Moriarty?"

"Grey, Moriarty... what's in a name anyway?" Grey asked. "It is the actions of a man that speak for or against him."

He opened an oblong wooden box and took out a cigar. "My dear Holmes, I would offer you and your Watsons a cigar, but I'm afraid you shouldn't start bad habits at your young age." He smiled.

"Well, aren't you at all surprised that we found you?" Pete asked. The serenity of Grey irritated him.

"Why should I? I was aware that you were an exceptional trio of investigators. I was expecting a visit any day. It is a pity that you gave me a false address. As I have just heard from my people, Lester Price could not be found at the address given. It is a vacant house that will be sold this week." He looked at the boys. "—But you already know that, don't you?"

Pete and Bob did not show any surprise, and a brief moment later, they realized that they might have just given Mr Grey an affirmative answer.

Mr Grey smiled. "Well, you will certainly know where Lester Price is at present, and you will tell me."

"I wouldn't assume that, sir!" Jupiter objected.

Grey rolled out from behind the desk. "I enjoyed following your activities. I even took the liberty of betting with my business partner in New York that you would manage to decode the message within a week." He stroked a bronze horse sculpture. "I've never lost a bet before."

"If you think that all you have to do is flatter me to get the address on the table, you are mistaken!" Jupiter sat down on one of the leather visitor chairs. "I have come here to ask you to settle this matter with my uncle. I would also like the electricity in our house reinstated immediately."

"Gladly." Grey was still smiling.

The Three Investigators were surprised. Bob even thought he had misheard the man.

"Yes, I am happy to undo everything... but of course not without a little something in return."

"The address of Lester Price?"

"You got that right."

"We know that he is in a witness protection programme after testifying against your business partner in New York, and he could implicate you as well."

"Tsk! Tsk! What makes you think this is the case?" Grey was still smiling.

"Then why are you looking for Price?" Jupiter asked imperturbably. "Is it a small favour among crooks? Or could he perhaps say something that incriminates you after all? Perhaps he has photos or evidences that prove dark business deals..."

"And what evidences would those be?"

"I may be young, but you can't fool me, Mr Grey. I know you play an important role in the LA gangland."

"Oh, do I?"

"Denial is futile."

"Well, you have something I want," Grey said calmly, "and you want your life to get back on track."

"Under these circumstances, we are unlikely to reach an agreement," Jupiter said.

"You just tell me where and when you last met him," Grey repeated his demand.

"It's of no use to you," Jupe replied. "By now, he would have contacted the Marshals Service and got himself relocated elsewhere—to a place that I have no way of knowing."

"That you leave to me, my dear Holmes... You don't know my methods." Grey leaned forward to the First Investigator. "I tell you what... I will make you an offer."

"—Of which I will refuse," replied Jupiter.

"I don't think you can!" Grey continued. "You will compete in a duel. If you win, your uncle will go free and I will also settle the other annoying little matters. If I win, you must give me the address immediately."

"What makes you think I would go into a game like that?"

"Because it's not a game. It's a serious matter—deadly serious, in fact..."

"So I don't have any other choice at all!" said Jupiter.

"Not really! I am not an unreasonable man, my dear Holmes. Of course, I'm going to give you a choice—the choice of weapons!"

He rolled up into a huge mahogany cabinet and opened the door. "Let's see... we have a pair of nineteenth-century revolvers—very fitting for a clash between Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty, don't you think? Or would you prefer a sword? I have a very nice pair—antique, but still as dangerous as ever."

"The only weapon I use is my mind," said Jupiter.

"Aha! I've been waiting for that answer." Grey closed the cabinet doors. "I'm glad to be right again. It will be my pleasure to fight this duel on an intellectual level." He took a bell from the table and rang it. "Of course, we will carry out the duel in the garden. The weather today is excellent and I do not want to deprive you of the appropriate scenery. You will be delighted!"

The butler entered the room. "You called, sir?"

"Get Rodriguez and his men. The three gentlemen here and I have a little matter which we will settle in the garden... and please tell Kowalski to set up the chess table in the shady spot."

"Very well, sir!" With that, the butler went off.

Jupiter breathed a sigh of relief. He was a gifted chess player. So far he had won all the school tournaments. In a duel on the black and white board, he had a good chance of winning.

"Follow me, please." Mr Grey turned his wheelchair around and rolled out to the hall. "If you were a true Sherlock Holmes, you'd like the scenery. My gardens are tended by a whole team of British country-style gardeners."

The boys followed the man out of the house. In fact, it looked like a British estate here too.

"By the way, the real highlight of the garden landscape was already here before I moved in. An old millionairess had something very special built here!"

The moment The Three Investigators stepped out to the garden, they stopped abruptly. Behind a high boxwood hedge, the terrain rose steeply. One side of the slope was supported by large granite boulders, over which a rushing waterfall poured over ten metres into the depths.

Grey then turned to them. "Well, have I promised too much? Isn't this a perfect setting for the great duel between Holmes and Moriarty?"

16. Thor Bridge

Jupiter, Pete and Bob had their feet rooted to the ground. Immediately, the First Investigator suspected that Grey might want to recreate the Reichenbach Falls duel—in his backyard! This was not good, for according to the Doyle short story, both men fell down the falls. Clearly Grey would want a twist to this outcome.

His thoughts were abruptly interrupted by Grey: “Old Mrs Duberville, who used to own this estate, loved waterfalls, so she had one built here by a well-known landscape architect. Of course, it had to be a magnificent creation. Two streams nearby were diverted into a new stream especially for the waterfall. In the dry season, water is artificially fed to it via an underground pipe system.” Grey pointed to the stream, bubbling and foaming over the banks. “I can control it with a pump. I’ve had the strongest flow set especially for you, Holmes.”

Jupiter looked around the garden. Two bridges led over the stream. One was directly near where the mass of water poured down; and a second one, which was obviously newly built, was positioned a short distance away.

“The bridge by the waterfall is a gem. I call it Thor Bridge, obviously,” Grey explained in a friendly chatting tone. “Unfortunately, the problem is that this bridge is very old and beyond repair. I can’t use it anymore so I’m going to have it demolished.”

Meanwhile, his people were setting up a table. In the background stood three guards—two muscular men and a woman.

“I have a question, my dear master investigator.” Grey gave the First Investigator a penetrating look. “If you found yourself in a situation where you could save only one of your Watsons, who would you choose?”

“What is the purpose of this question?” Jupe frowned.

“Please just answer me.”

“I would try to save them both.”

“And if that were impossible?” Moriarty replied. “Whose life would you save?”

Jupiter looked from Bob to Pete. There was no real answer to this question. The two were his best friends, each in his own way. That is why he kept silent.

“I must ask you to reply, in your own best interest.” Grey’s voice was still friendly, but there was an icy look in his eyes.

Jupiter clenched his hands into fists.

“I’m waiting, Holmes!”

In Jupiter’s head, soft voices were heard that were slowly getting louder: ‘Just say a name, any name. Don’t think long. You can only lose!’

He took a deep breath and then said: “Pete... I would save Pete.” Jupiter didn’t dare look Bob in the eye. He stared at the ground.

“Wonderful!” Grey clapped. “Since you have chosen to save Pete, I’m sure he’ll do the same for you.”

“Pete has already saved my life several times,” Jupiter told him gruffly.

“Excellent! Then he will certainly represent your interests well.” Grey pointed to the table where the chessboard was now set up with the pieces in place. “If I could ask Pete Crenshaw to sit down at the table.”

Pete gulped in shock.

"I thought we were going to compete." Jupiter got nervous.

"That would be too easy." Grey pulled over by the rotten old bridge. "Where would be the fun in that. After all, a game thrives on the constant thrill."

"Who will compete against Pete?" asked Jupiter.

"Michael Kowalski, one of my employees, is an excellent chess player. He will represent me with dignity at this game." The gangland boss pointed to a man with short brown hair and round glasses. "Now if your player will please take a seat at the table, we can then proceed."

Jupiter gave Pete a frightened look. The Second Investigator was deadly pale. He could gain much more from a basketball game than from a round of chess. The last time he had played Jupiter, he had mixed up the queen and the bishops, and had got his king checkmated after five minutes.

Bob raised his eyebrows as if to say: 'If only Jupe had chosen me!'

Slowly Pete and Kowalski sat down opposite each other at the table.

"The players have taken up their positions... but now for the really exciting part." He gave his guards a signal.

Shortly afterwards, two guards hauled in a young man. He was obviously showing resistance.

"May I introduce you to one of my stable boys..." Grey said. "Unfortunately, he has been neglecting his duties lately. One of my most expensive mares almost ran away because he didn't close the stall door properly."

"I'm sorry, Mr Grey!" yelled the young man. "It will never happen again! Really!"

"Well, we'll see if you're ever going to enter my stables again... or better." Grey turned to his guards. "Put him on this side of the bridge! He'll be the black pawn."

"No, sir! Please!" cried the stable boy in panic as he was practically dragged towards the waterfall. "I'll do anything you want!"

Grey ignored the young man. He smiled at Jupiter. "Now, Mr Holmes, you'll be the white pawn. Would you please go to the opposite end of the bridge. You can use that new bridge over there."

"What are you doing?" Bob burst out as two guards approached Jupiter.

"A duel," Grey explained. "The rules are simple. For each chess piece lost on the board, the corresponding human pawn on the bridge must walk a number of steps—"

"—Across the bridge?" Bob exclaimed. "It can collapse at any time!"

"Of course! Where else would the suspense be?"

"If it collapses, Jupe and your stable boy will plunge down the waterfall and crash into the rocks below."

"At least one of them... but it need not necessarily be fatal..." Grey leaned back.

"Although... there are sharp rocks below the bridge."

Bob was shocked beyond words.

"Anyway, before I was rudely interrupted..." Mr Grey took a quick glance at Bob. "—I have to explain the rules to the players and the two human pawns on the bridge... so listen up! Players—like I said, if you lose a piece on the board, your human pawn must walk a number of steps towards the centre of the bridge. Losing a pawn means one step; a bishop or knight—three steps; a rook—five steps; and a queen—nine steps. If a player loses the king and thus the match, the losing pawn walks straight to the centre of the bridge. The winning pawn gets to come off. Clear?"

Nobody said a word.

“Oh yes, there is one more thing,” Mr Grey continued on. “The chess clock is in play. Each player gets up to one minute to make a move. If your time expires, your pawn on the bridge takes one step forward, and henceforth for every additional minute you take.”

The Second Investigator looked over to Jupiter who had now been led to his place on the opposite end of the bridge. He wouldn’t trade places with his friend for anything in the world at that moment, but his own situation was not exactly pleasant either. He was responsible for Jupiter’s fate. A single mistake could cost the First Investigator his life.

“Now, if there are no more questions, I’ll give the players a minute to strategize before we start,” Grey announced.

17. The Final Problem

Pete was in a dilemma. He looked down at the chess pieces in horror. He had to save Jupiter, but he also did not want anything to happen to the stable boy. The bridge was so rotten that it would not hold Jupe's weight for long.

The Second Investigator knew he only had a long shot at winning. Even though he understood the basic movements of the chess pieces, he was weak in strategy. Why had Jupiter not chosen Bob? Bob was better at chess; Bob was smarter; and Bob knew what to do. This was not Pete's type of challenge! Basketball, surfing, running—yes, but not chess! Now the situation could no longer be changed. He had to have a plan on how to approach this. Fervently, he hoped this would be the final problem from Grey.

Suddenly he got it figured out! This was not a typical chess game to capture the opponent's king. There was another objective, and that was to delay the pieces from being captured. When no piece was removed from the board, nobody on the bridge needed to move.

Now, Pete knew exactly what he had to do—avoid losing a chess piece—any piece, on both sides. Then he also had to stall the game as long as possible. As for Jupe and the stable boy, he had to leave it to fate as to who would go down.

Startling him out of his thoughts, Mr Grey announced: "Time's up! Let the game begin! And may the best man win!" Grey rang his bell.

Pete hesitated, but playing with the white pieces, he had to make the first move. He waited for 55 seconds, and then with trembling fingers, he moved a white pawn one square forward.

Without hesitation, Kowalski moved forward a black pawn two squares, forcing Pete to his next move. However, with the Second Investigator's delay tactics, in the next five to six minutes, there were no pieces captured on both sides. That gave him courage. His plan was working!

Pete positioned his pawns close to each other to form a tight line of defence. If one pawn was captured, he should be able to counter by capturing his opponent's piece—preferably a bigger piece. Once he had each pawn covered, Pete decided to use his knight. He moved one knight forward, and then in very next move, he moved it back to the previous position. Then he did that with other pieces as well.

Bob, who was watching the game on the sidelines, realized what Pete was doing. The Second Investigator was a genius! Pete's tactic worked big time. If he tried to play, he was likely to get caught out and lose his pieces.

On the other hand, it was different for his opponent. The gangster wouldn't even care who fell down from the bridge. He stormed ahead by pushing his pieces forward, but was frustrated with the way Pete was playing.

"Hey!" Kowalski eventually called out. "This guy is not playing a proper chess match! He's just moving his pieces back and forth. I'm not even sure he knows what he's doing!"

On the contrary, Pete knew what he was doing. He just kept quiet, focussing on his next move to frustrate his opponent. It wasn't an entertaining game to watch at all—nor was it meant to be.

Jupiter wondered when he would have to walk. Sooner or later Pete's chess pieces would fall. That could not be avoided.

"It's getting very boring," Mr Grey called out. "There has been no movement on the bridge! Get on with it, Kowalski!"

Spurred on by his employer, Kowalski decided to take out one of Pete's pawn with his bishop. The man took the white pawn and put it next to the board where it was rolling around lost.

"Finally! One pawn down for white!" Grey made a hand movement towards the bridge. "Mr Holmes... one step forward please!"

Jupiter's heart seized up. There was a guard just behind him and he pushed the First Investigator forward.

At the table on the shady spot, Pete held his breath. When his turn was almost up, he countered by taking out the black bishop.

"Three steps forward for black!" Grey called out.

Two of his men pushed the stable boy forward, but he resisted. Desperately, he shouted: "No! I won't do that!" He clawed at the railing of the bridge until his knuckles turned completely white, which only caused the rotten wood to crumble.

"If I were you, I'd walk," Grey said calmly. In the end, the stable boy had no choice. Grey's men built themselves up behind him with folded arms, blocking the way back. Jupiter suspected they were armed.

The First Investigator felt sorry for the stable boy, but at the same time, he was relieved. So far Pete had held on well—surprisingly well, in fact! However, at some point Jupe would have to continue walking. He was much heavier than the stable boy, who would be able to stay on the rotten boards much longer than him.

Just then, Grey announced: "Another pawn down for white... Take one step, my dear Holmes!"

Within a minute, Pete made a move and caught Kowalski's knight. It was the turn of the desperate stable boy again.

"Black knight down," Grey called out. "Black moves three steps... Be glad it was a knight... the queen would mean more steps."

However, the stable boy vehemently refused to take a single step. His fear of the waterfall was apparently greater than that of Grey's men.

Grey himself rolled towards the stable boy. He slowed down at the bridge and ordered: "Go on, go on!"

The stable boy closed his eyes. The bridge trembled as he took the prescribed three steps.

"Not bad," Grey said to Jupe. "Your Watson represents you better than I had expected."

However, Jupiter was expecting that every move from now would have a piece being taken out. He expected Kowalski to be relentless and would continue taking off Pete's pieces, and Pete had to counter.

Unfortunately for the First Investigator, in the following move, Kowalski took out Pete's bishop.

"White bishop is out!" Grey announced with glee. "Three steps for white!"

Jupiter had the feeling that his legs were made of rubber. The wood creaked threateningly under his feet. From the corners of his eyes, he saw the foaming water splashing vigorously under the bridge. Again the wood creaked... but it held. The First Investigator forced himself to remain calm. Slowly he lifted his eyes from the water below and took three steps forward.

It drove Jupiter through his head that this was not going well! If they met in the middle, the bridge would definitely collapse. There would be no winner and no loser. Just like

Sherlock Holmes, he would perish in the gush of a waterfall... with one difference—in that he, Jupiter, might not return.

At that moment, police sirens sounded outside Grey's manor. Jupiter could hardly believe it. It was as if someone had flipped a switch.

One of Grey's men immediately took flight. Kowalski also jumped up so abruptly that the chessboard was swept off the table. This commotion was exploited by the stable boy, who ran for his life off the bridge to the solid ground. The guard wanted to hold him down, but in his boundless panic, the stable boy pushed so hard that the big man lost his balance and fell over and crashed into Grey's wheelchair with full force.

Bob, who was standing just a few metres away, wondered exactly what had happened. His eyes could barely keep up. People were falling over each other. The wheelchair with Grey was pushed out of the way.

Bob made a leap backwards. Wooden boards broke, people ran all over the place and water splashed on the ground. He heard screams from all directions. In the next second, where the bridge had stood earlier, there was nothing but an abyss of thundering water masses.

The bridge, the wheelchair, Grey and Jupiter—they were no longer there. The waterfall had swallowed its victims.

"LA Police!" One of the numerous police officers held up a badge. His fellow officers grabbed Grey's men in the process.

"Jupe!" Bob had to force himself to go to the stream.

The First Investigator could not have survived this fall. The waterfall was very high and the catch basin not deep enough and much too hard and stony. On the way to the edge of the stream, he was caught up by Pete.

They saw how the stream below the waterfall carried away the remains of the smashed wheelchair.

"I can't watch this!" Pete said tonelessly.

Bob felt like he was going to throw up. This simply could not be the end of Jupiter Jones, their friend and leader of The Three Investigators!

"Are you all right?" asked Chief Reynolds, who had just came up behind them. "I have notified my colleagues in LA, as Jupiter asked me to do in his letter."

"He... he's..." Bob could not manage to get the words out of his mouth.

"What is it?" Reynolds asked worriedly.

Then Bob pulled himself together. "Call an ambulance immediately, sir, and send someone here. We need help! It is possible that Jupe survived the fall! Now every second counts!"

Then he turned on his heel and started moving towards the collapsed bridge, next to the waterfall. He was not allowed to let himself be overwhelmed by the fear for his friend. Jupiter would also have tried to stay calm and achieve certainty, and that's what Bob had to do now, even if he might see something terrible.

Bob had already reached near the waterfall, peering over the edge. His heart was beating so hard that it hurt.

"Do you see anything?" Pete asked behind him in a shaky voice.

Bob could not answer. What he saw was just too incredible. A short distance from the waterfall, Jupiter was holding his ground as best he could on a slippery rock that protruded from the gushing water stream. With both hands, he had grabbed Grey and was pulling him out of the water.

"He's alive!" yelled Bob. "He's alive!"

18. His Last Bow

For Bob and Pete, it felt like an eternity until the police officers rescued Jupiter and Grey. Both were soaked and had abrasions, but nothing else had happened to them.

Pete put a blanket over Jupiter. "Oh man! And we thought we'd lost you forever."

"I'm just like Holmes." Jupiter brought a crooked smile to life. "I always come back!"

The wet Grey was treated by a police officer who bandaged his wounds.

Jupiter went to him and said: "The duel is over, I suppose."

"—And I'm going to take a little trip to the police department now," Grey said. It didn't sound very depressed.

"Your stable boy will certainly testify against you, and perhaps Lester Price as well, wherever he is now." Jupiter crossed his arms. "I think you'll be sued without our involvement, sir."

"My lawyers will defend me well. Perhaps I'll soon be free, Holmes." He looked up at Jupiter. "Well, now don't make that face! You and your friends will have nothing to fear. On the contrary, I am in your debt. You could have just let me die... but you didn't. Instead, you saved me. I give you credit for that. Instead of paying you a sum of money, I'm going to give you and your Watsons the gift of life."

"Will you tell the police that you falsely accused my uncle of receiving stolen goods?"

"That will work itself out, believe me, just like the thing with the electricity company."

He nodded at his butler.

"What about the bugs in our headquarters?" Jupe asked in case there were more than the five 'orange pips' they discovered.

"That can be arranged as well... You need not worry about them, Holmes. Trust me! I'll have the receivers destroyed." He paused for a while and then continued: "—But regarding the marathon, I would hope that you will go through with it. It is, so to speak, an additional gift to you. It will do you good... and just think of all the poor children you'll make happy."

"If I can take you at your word, I am satisfied with the offer," said Jupiter.

"You can do it! I never break my word, just like I never lose a bet. I have my principles. Well, I can see I'm going to have to leave now. Maybe I'll come to you with another assignment sometime. Your agency shows real promise."

Then he gave a short last bow to the three boys before being led off.

Two days later, The Three Investigators were at the Rocky Beach Police Department with Aunt Mathilda and Chief Reynolds. The five were waiting impatiently for Uncle Titus to be released from custody.

Although Grey was now in police custody, he had managed to keep his promises to Jupiter—especially the release of Uncle Titus. The First Investigator suspected that Grey's influence was still enormous even under police detention, but that could not spoil his good mood that day.

"What is taking so long?" Aunt Mathilda was visibly nervous. She had put on her best dress for the occasion and packed a gigantic provision basket with cherry pie and sandwiches that would have been enough for a whole company.

"Before your husband can leave, there is some paperwork to be completed, the usual formalities," Reynolds explained kindly.

Then finally the door at the other end of the waiting room opened and Uncle Titus stepped out. He looked a little narrower and paler than usual, but came towards the small group with a radiant look. He was followed by Inspector Cotta and a policeman who looked very grumpy—Kenny Cinelly! The Three Investigators grinned until they caught a stern look from Inspector Cotta.

Meanwhile, Aunt Mathilda threw herself into Uncle Titus's arms as if he had been away for years and not just a few days.

"You should have given him more to eat," said Aunt Mathilda reproachfully, without letting go of Uncle Titus who was visibly gasping for breath.

Inspector Cotta could hardly stop laughing. "As far as the food we provide here, we cannot make exceptions," he said, and then pointed to Kenny Cinelly. "By the way, my colleague here has something to say."

Cinelly looked down and there was no sign of his usual arrogance. Everyone looked at him expectantly, until finally he mechanically unwound his text: "I am very sorry, ma'am. I was mistaken. Your husband is innocent. I apologize to you and your family for my mistake." The last words obviously cost him a lot of effort.

Aunt Mathilda was in such high spirits that she only replied: "I forgive you, but next time, young man, you better watch out before you detain innocent citizens and let real criminals go!"

For once, Jupiter said nothing at all, but was content to watch Kenny Cinelly walk back to his office with his tail behind his legs. His apology had been a real satisfaction for the First Investigator.

Aunt Mathilda had apparently already forgotten the young policeman. She pressed several rolls into Titus's hand. "It's best to start with this. Then we'll have some pie and when you get home, I'll cook you a steak." She turned to Reynolds and Cotta. "Would you like some?"

"Perhaps not now, Mrs Jones." Inspector Cotta raised his hands defensively. "I'd rather have some explanations from your nephew."

"If you don't mind, I'd like to leave," Uncle Titus said politely. He patted Jupiter on the shoulder. "Don't stay too long! I'm dying to hear the whole story later."

After the Jones couple had left, The Three Investigators sat down with Inspector Cotta and Chief Reynolds in Cotta's office.

"How is it that you are back so soon?" asked Jupiter as the inspector sat down.

"My brother managed to rent the most dilapidated forest cabin ever, and there was not a single fish in the lake, so we ended our holiday early." Inspector Cotta crumpled up a leaflet with fishing equipment and threw it in the trash. "When I came back, Samuel told me you were in trouble."

"That is unfortunately true," said Jupiter, "but Chief Reynolds has been a great help to us."

"I am glad that I can still be of use as a pensioner," Reynolds replied, "but please promise me you won't get involved with the gangland again!"

"I will gladly give you that in writing," said Pete.

"We drew the short straw when we solved the case of the building plans," Jupiter said with a sigh. "—Otherwise Moriarty would never have become aware of us."

"I have a question," the retired chief said. "I would like to know what this dubious gemstone was all about."

"You mean the blue carbuncle? Cinelly told me earlier that the owner had withdrawn the charge of theft," Cotta said. "A henchman of Grey's disguised as a customer had hidden the stone in the salvage yard and then anonymously informed us."

"I can guess the rest," said Chief Reynolds amusedly. "Cinelly saw his big chance coming and immediately brought out the big guns."

"That's exactly how it was," Pete confirmed. "He was acting like the Sheriff of Nottingham!"

"We suspect that the owner of the stone owed Grey a great favour. Perhaps we can clarify this in the course of our investigation." Inspector Cotta then turned to Bob. "Now I'd like to see this interesting watch you used to expose Grey."

Bob handed it to him. "Jupe fixed a tracking device and a bug in this watch. We left the receiver with Worthington who parked his car a short distance away from Grey's estate. He overheard the entire conversation we had with Grey. When we were led out to the garden, Worthington decided that it was the appropriate moment to notify Chief Reynolds, who then contacted the LAPD."

"Nevertheless, this case almost came to a bad end," Inspector Cotta stated.

Bob put the watch back on. "Fortunately, Grey is in custody for this," he said.

"What will happen to Grey now," Pete asked.

"It's in the hands of the LAPD," Cotta said. "I believe that the stable boy will press charges against his former employer."

"Wonderful!"

"Well, it's not all that wonderful," Cotta countered. "The young man is not a member of Grey's inner circle. He can therefore only provide limited information. If we're going to nail Grey, it'll be because of what happened at the waterfall."

"But Lester Price can also testify," Pete interjected.

"Well, I have no information on that yet, but I hope he will come forth," Cotta said. "We hope that this will give us solid material that we can use to give Grey a real trial. It's very difficult to convict the very big wire-pullers. In fact, the State Police had previously assigned an undercover man to Grey to watch his business, but that action has failed."

"If the police couldn't expose him," Pete asked uncertainly, "was it a mistake that we ended up calling you?"

"No!" Chief Reynolds reassured him. "You did everything right."

"There was no other option," Cotta added. "You saved Lester Price's life and made sure Grey could not harm you. That's quite an accomplishment."

"And on top of that, you don't have to go under witness protection, which means you can still go on a wild goose chase around Rocky Beach." Chief Reynolds laughed.

"We will," Pete promised, "after all, we already have a new assignment."

"What case is it this time?" Inspector Cotta frowned.

"Not a case, but a kind of mission. Bob and I are training Jupe for the big quarter marathon."

"This is really something new! Jupiter Jones in a marathon." Inspector Cotta looked at the First Investigator. "How did you come to this?"

"Mr Grey signed him up for it," Pete said.

"What?" Cotta remarked. "Why did he do that?"

"I know why," Bob said.

"Oh yeah?" Pete remarked. "Why?"

"You know after our case at Weston & Weston," Bob began, "Jupe talked about his stupid pumpkin diet thing for four days before we received the first letter from Mr Grey.

Well, Mr Grey sent him a gift of the quarter marathon to help him with his weight because he overheard all our conversations at Headquarters."

"Come to think of it, the timing was correct," Pete agreed.

"So, Jupe," Bob continued, "you should heed the advice of our illustrious former client. Drop the diet and start training for the marathon."

"No way!" Jupe disagreed. "I'll do it my way."

"So how are you going to cover the distance?" Cotta asked.

"This!" Jupiter put a yellow flyer on the desk.

Surprised, everyone bent over the paper. It said in big black letters:

Rent- 'n-Ride Auto Agency—We take you to your destination quickly and comfortably!

Jupiter looked satisfied. "Nowhere in the rules does it say that you have to start on foot... so I can always rely on our chauffeur Worthington."

Chief Reynolds laughed. "Boy, I'm really looking forward to the newspaper coverage of this run!"

"The Three Investigators are always good for a surprise." Jupiter stood up and took his jacket. Then he turned to his two colleagues who stared at him in disgust.

"Come on, fellas! Out there, the next case is probably waiting for us." Grinning, he added: "—Along with Aunt Mathilda's cherry pie!"